



MIDNIGHT

Player

A Dungeon Singles Night Novella

ANYA SUMMERS

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A DUNGEON SINGLES NIGHT NOVELLA

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ABOUT THE BOOK

On the eve of the biggest game of his professional baseball career, bad boy Jake is distracted by a beautiful girl. He takes one look at Willa's gorgeous fifties pinup body, and knows she's the woman he's been waiting for. With just one weekend to score the biggest win of his life—Willa's heart—can Jake convince the shy wallflower to take a chance on love?

*F*uck me.

Well, that game could have gone better.

Cunningham acted like he'd done lines of cocaine before taking the mound he'd been so wound up. No matter what Jake did, he hadn't been able to calm the poor bastard down. The rookie lobbed balls right through the dead center of the strike zone. Even the Houston Howlers' worst hitters had scored base hits.

By the top of the third inning, his team, the Philadelphia Flashers, were down by five. Hard to come back from a deficit like that on enemy turf. And the team never recovered the lost ground, even when Coach Davis yanked Cunningham out in the fourth inning. The damage was already done.

Jake nursed his beer. The championship series was tied three-three. Tomorrow night's game would determine whether he and his team were world champions or just another team that didn't have what it took to go all the way.

Their star pitcher Ishii was set to take the mound in the do-or-die game.

Nocturne, the Vivaldi Hotel's hidden art déco bar, was a head trip. It made him feel like a gangster from the 1920s who was drinking at a prohibition bar. The maroon and gold theme added a classy, decadent touch. But his favorite aspect was that he didn't have to pretend he was fine with the way shit went down tonight. Because he wasn't okay with it. He wanted that fucking ring. Ambitious to a fault, it wasn't good

enough that he'd made the big leagues. His competitive spirit yearned to earn the title of world champion.

Jake liked his teammates, which wasn't always the case. He was one of the old timers at thirty-three. And while an injury could take him down, he wasn't ready to hang his catcher's glove up yet. But this was a good team. He admired the hell out of his coaches. They'd played their hearts out tonight, but the other team had been better.

After a loss, he didn't want to get blitzed as if nothing had happened. The media dubbed him professional baseball's bad boy, the player who always had a new woman on his arm. Except it was just an image, one he earned and couldn't deny. He was rather cavalier when it came to dating and one-night stands. Yet after a loss, he preferred solitude. And he tended to nurse a beer or two alone while reviewing the game in his mind. Then he determined if he'd have done anything differently and whether it could have altered the outcome.

The only thing which might have made a difference tonight was if Cunningham had been yanked sooner. But even that might not have been enough to save the game.

Nocturne was packed tonight. He spied a world-famous comedian and his massive, ebony-skinned, bald-headed bodyguard near the opposite end of the fancy wall bar. The rest of the seats were occupied by people with more money than sense, but who was he to judge?

At least the seat on his left was still empty. The couple to the right of him wasn't paying him any heed. She was quite the looker with her fake tits and even faker smile. But then, she was with a man whose massive belly protruded over his belt, straining the confines of his dress shirt, and had to be two decades older than his date.

The situation screamed gold digger with a married guy if the pale stripe around his third finger was anything to go by.

Jake took a long swallow of beer. The media would give itself a hernia if they realized he wasn't out scoring pussy as much as the tabloids reported that he did. Now that didn't mean he wouldn't walk out into the main bar and find a

woman to hook up with. Except there was some romance writers' conference with oodles of women out there that he wanted to avoid at all costs. Because to his mind, romance books were unrealistic.

Besides, he wasn't in the mood for a casual hookup. Jake hadn't gone the hookup route for quite a while. At his age, he'd already traveled the Dionysus path, gorging on alcohol and women. When he first started in the big leagues, for the first time in his life, he had money and celebrity status. And women had thrown themselves at him. And not simply the run-of-the-mill fans either. He was talking supermodels, actresses, and the hottest women alive.

But at thirty-three, with a few more years left before retirement, he'd started thinking about what he'd do after. Jake wanted a wife and kids, but it had to be the *right* woman. He wouldn't settle for a woman who simply hit the gene pool lottery. Surprisingly enough, he yearned for a woman he could be intimate with, talk to about her hopes and dreams, and commit to body and soul. At the end of the day, he wanted to be the family guy.

Surprised the fuck out of him too, but there you have it.

And it was why he sat alone, contemplating the game and what he would do in the offseason.

Staring at a droplet of condensation on his beer bottle, he felt her slide onto the seat beside him before he saw her. The woman's subtle amber fragrance teased his nostrils. Jake shifted, needing to catch a glimpse of the mystery woman. If there was one thing he excelled at, even more than throwing out a runner stealing second, it was charming the panties off women. And if she looked as good as she smelled, it was game on. He wouldn't sit this one out. A night tearing up the sheets would clear his head and get him prepared for the game.

Fuck me.

Lightning struck his spine and shot through his torso. His cock twitched, scenting the woman like a caveman. Everything inside him bellowed: *There! Finally! It's her! The one he'd waited for all his life.*

Fate had left the seat open for her. He was convinced.

A tumble of thick, chestnut hair fell over her soft shoulders. He rubbed his thumb and finger together, imagining how her silky strands would feel in his hands. But her face ... Her face was a thing of beauty. Poets should write sonnets in her name. Milky porcelain skin with a dusting of tan freckles crossed the bridge of her nose. Gently arched brows, the same color as her hair, framed eyes that reminded him of smoke. Lushly formed lips were painted a sinful red, and he immediately imagined how they would look around his dick.

His gaze trailed down her elegant neck, and he damn near swallowed his tongue. He shifted in his seat to alleviate the pressure of his erection straining the confines of his jeans. A single glance at her killer body in a form-fitting pink dress that displayed her tits to perfection turned him into a randy teen incapable of controlling his hormones.

She looked like his every fantasy brought to life and had the body of a fifties pinup model. Lush and curvy in all the right places with her waist nipped in tight. This was a woman who enjoyed life. Her plump tits left him aching for a taste.

She glanced his way briefly before dropping her gaze. A rosy flush spread into her cheeks. And Christ, but she was sweet when a mere glance left her blushing.

A dirty, depraved vision of the two of them tearing up his sheets flash-fried his brain.

He vowed he wasn't leaving this bar without her. God, he couldn't wait to touch her, feel all those lush curves wrapped around him as he pounded inside her. Was she a screamer or silent when she came? He'd bet she was a screamer. Either way, he couldn't wait to find out.

And here he thought tonight would be dull with a heaping side of mental castigation.

Instead, he'd charm her into his bed and spend his night worshipping her sweet curves. "Hey there, sugar. What are you drinking?"

Willa escaped the crush of people in the main bar area with a relieved sigh. Between the numerous writers from her conference and the players and staff for the Philadelphia Flashes staying at the hotel this weekend, there wasn't a seat available. Willa was thrilled she had scored a spot at the Vivaldi's hidden bar, Nocturne, because it was significantly less crowded. Months ago, when she first booked her stay at the Vivaldi, after conducting some extensive research on the hotel, she discovered Nocturne's existence. The only way to visit the secret bar was to make a reservation many months in advance. For Willa, avoiding the crush of bodies was a dream come true.

Plus, she felt like one of her badass heroines instead of what she really was: a shy wallflower more comfortable at home with her books.

But in Nocturne, with its 1920s art déco theme, she could breathe without the throngs pressing in on her. At least she could until she glanced at the man beside her. Handsome didn't begin to describe him. She only looked for a moment because staring was rude. As an avowed introvert, Willa wasn't stellar at polite conversation or being around people—or acting like a normal human. She could only come across as normal in her books through her characters with their snappy dialogue.

But in real life, she didn't fit in.

Whoever the guy was, he was the hottest man she'd seen outside of her own imagination. If she wrote about him, she'd describe him as a dashing rake. Devilishly attractive with inky hair slicked away from a face that was all hard angles and proud features that commanded a woman's attention. His full lips were shrouded by a few days' worth of dark stubble.

At his question, she shifted toward him. Why was this man talking to her? Was he waiting for someone? Surely, he wasn't hitting on her. This guy could score any woman he wanted. No, seriously, he was that gorgeous. She'd bet when he passed by, women automatically dropped their panties. She was fighting to keep hers on.

He clearly worked out. His six-foot build was packed with oodles of muscles. They strained his navy button-down shirt, providing a clear glimpse of chiseled shoulders and biceps. He'd loosened the collar. In the open vee, she spied a hint of inky chest hair. She liked that he had hair on his chest instead of the trend where men shaved their chests. She liked a man with hair on his body.

The sleeves were rolled up near his elbows. Willa wanted to fan her face. Because he had the sexiest forearms. On his left wrist, he sported a silver Bulgari watch. Whoever this sexy dude was, he clearly had money. The owner of *The Eros Pit*, the lifestyle club she belonged to in Denver, wore a Bulgari watch. She'd looked the brand and model up once out of curiosity, the writer's curse, and it sold for fifty grand—for a watch.

"Sugar? Really?" She arched a brow in question. For someone with money, she was shocked he used such a lame pickup line. But he wasn't really hitting on her. Right?

She wasn't model thin by a long shot. Her body didn't want to lose its curves, no matter how hard she tried. She finally made peace with the fact that she had boobs and an ass in an hourglass figure. And this testosterone-laden alpha was so far out of her league he was on the dark side of the moon.

Willa staunchly ignored the way his sexy, Southern drawl curled and twisted inside her chest, sending sparks of

electricity into her core.

He shifted his big body until he faced her. With eyes so dark a blue they resembled the twilight sky, his hot gaze slid over her body like a caress. Jesus, when he stared, her body went up in flames. Her girl parts throbbed.

In her twenty-seven years, she'd never had a man look like he wanted to eat her up one delectable bite at a time. The guy dripped with sex appeal. His intense smolder turned the throb into a flaming ache spreading through her limbs until her entire being felt engulfed by the inferno.

What was this guy doing to her? She'd been around commanding alphas for years but never had one affect her this way.

Willa wanted to fan herself. Her skin felt three sizes too small beneath his brazen stare.

She might be able to write women who were smart, sassy, and could hold their own with the men they were destined to find their happily ever after with. But in real life, she grew tongue-tied, was painfully shy, and never knew how to respond.

He licked his lips when his gaze landed on her breasts, like he was imagining the way they'd taste. It didn't help that her nipples puckered up under his fiery stare and were so stiff against her dress there was no way he didn't see them—the little traitors.

“Yep. Because you look just as sweet as my mama's pecan pie. And I just want to eat you up. I'm Jake. And who might you be, sugar?”

She shivered at his lusty innuendo.

“Willa.” She lowered her gaze, her natural submissive tendencies kicking into high gear. “Where are you from?” She could handle this. Make small talk with the sexy alpha.

“Willa. Beautiful name. Originally, I'm from Louisiana bayou country just outside of New Orleans. Currently, I'm in Philadelphia. And what about you, sugar?”

The way he drawled over the endearment sugar made it sound naughty and decadent in the same breath. “Denver.”

“And tell me, beautiful Willa. Are you here by yourself? Or do I have to go take care of the poor schmuck you’re with so I can have you all to myself?”

Shock had her lifting her gaze from where they’d been trained on his thick muscular thighs, straining his dark gray slacks. *Holy shit!*

He *was* flirting with her. Willa didn’t know what surprised her more, that he was flirting with her or how much she enjoyed his attention. When would she ever have a man who looked like him hit on her? Even at her lifestyle club, she was often passed over.

Breathless, she responded, “Yes, I’m all by my lonesome. I’m here for the romance writers’ conference. But there’s no one waiting for me back home either. And you?”

Willa wanted to applaud her ability to string words together in a cohesive fashion. A considerable feat when, internally, she was freaking out. Sirens blaring, lights flashing, smoke from the flames engulfing her sex choking her type of cataclysmic meltdown.

A slow, seductive grin spread over his face, turning him jaw-droppingly sexy. “That’s good to hear, Willa. We seem to be in luck. I’m single and here alone too. Or I was until you sat down.” He moved one of his feet to her barstool, boxing her legs in between his so their knees touched before he continued, “I’m in Houston because I’m the catcher for the Philadelphia Flashers in the Championship Series.”

“Wait, really?” Intrigued, she leaned forward, catching a whiff of his spicy cologne. She caught a hint of bergamot and sandalwood with some darker notes. Willa found it deeply sexy, making her want to rub her face in his manly, muscled chest and simply inhale him. But his job explained all his sexy beast muscles. Jake was a professional athlete. He’d gotten his muscles through hard work.

Willa respected the hell out of him for that. It was much the same with her writing career. She'd spent oodles of time alone with nothing but her computer, imagination, and grit to get where she was today.

“Yep. I’ve been in the big leagues for over a decade.”

“And you’re really not here with anyone?” She hated how skeptical she sounded. But things like this *never* happened to her. Not even when she attended *The Eros Pit* back home. She wasn’t the first choice for the Doms. They weren’t bad men or anything, but she was one of many and tended to be overlooked for slimmer submissives.

It was fine. She was used to it. Not that it made it any easier. But at this juncture, she was resigned to the fact.

“I am now.” He smiled. And Willa’s brain melted down. This man grinned, and her system went haywire. Her palms were sweating. Her nipples were hard enough to cut glass. And her sex pulsed, and all because of a damn smile.

Her lips curled. He was dashing, and definitely a player. But to be honest, she didn’t care. She wasn’t here looking to find her forever. However, she might enjoy a night with him. It would only be for a night. And it had been ages since she’d gotten any with all her back-to-back deadlines.

“Is that a fact?” Look at her, flirting with the player like she actually knew what she was doing.

“It is.” Jake stared like he had already undressed her in his mind and loved what he saw.

She dug her nails into her palm just to ensure she wasn’t in bed dreaming this. It happened to her before, and she needed to be sure. Because she doubted she could withstand the disappointment if that were the case.

The sexual tension between them grew palpable now that they both knew the other was single. And she hoped she was headed for a hookup with the sexy hunk, because she adored his attention—a bit too much. If this was an act on his part, where he’d ghost her or decide that she wasn’t what he was looking for, it might crush her.

But she couldn't worry about the what-ifs right now. Her anxiety liked to play this game, where she thought up everything that could possibly go wrong. And as an author with a wild imagination, she went to places most normal people never went.

Here she was in Houston, staying at a luxury hotel. And for a reason she couldn't explain, Jake, a professional athlete, was hitting on her hardcore. It made her want to know everything about him. What made him tick? What could he possibly see in her? Was she an easy mark? "Do you like it? Playing professional baseball, I mean."

Jake signaled the waiter, pointing out that she needed a drink before he responded. "I do. It can be a dog fight most days. We lost tonight. The championship series is tied. Tomorrow's game is winner take all. One team will walk away champions, and the other will just walk away. But it's how the game is played. Some days the other team outmaneuvers and outplays you. I've got a few years left before retirement, and I plan on playing until my body and my ability to produce on the field wane."

The bartender stopped by and took their drink order—another draft beer for him and a Cosmo for her.

"What do you like about it? I'm so curious about what you do. It's the writer's curse. The need to research how everything works. We were the kids who always asked why about everything and never grew out of it."

He cocked his head to the side. A smile teased the corners of his mouth. "Is that a fact? I love the game. I love being on a team and working to build a powerhouse that can obliterate the competition. I started playing tee ball as a toddler and never stopped playing. While I had a natural affinity for the sport, I still had to practice and sacrifice portions of my life to hone my body and reflexes into the player I am today."

Willa understood his sentiments. "It was much the same with writing. It took me years to develop my craft. All the hours I spent alone that I sacrificed and can never get back. And you're the catcher? That means you're on your knees a

lot.” She glanced down at the knees in question. Even through his slacks, she noticed they were exceptional knees.

Oh my god! Kill her now. Had she really talked about his knees?

God, she was an idiot. She shouldn't be allowed in public without adult supervision. She was convinced she was the reason her guardian angel drank.

“I am. Perhaps you'll find out just how good I am on my knees.” He bit his bottom lip flirtatiously.

Her ovaries fucking fainted.

Oh, this could be bad. But in a good way. Willa's entire body quivered at his lust-filled gaze. Jake gave her all sorts of bad thoughts about what he could do on his knees. Like lift the hem of her skirt up and part her thighs to—oh god, stop!

“You're a romance writer? And you're published?” He tilted his head to the right, those hot eyes full of dark deeds.

“Yeah, I am. Last month my twenty-fourth book released.” It still made her pinch herself that so many readers loved her stories.

“Twenty-four, really? So you're beautiful and smart. Do you write straight romance, or is it more specific than that?”

Willa blushed at his offhanded compliments. Because he meant them. There was an earnestness in his eyes. He wasn't bullshitting her to get into her pants. Her stupid heart sighed while her girly bits puckered up and blew him kisses. Those little bastards were ready to climb him like a tree. “No. Well, sort of. My genre is contemporary erotic romance.”

Jake's eyes went black with incendiary heat. He leaned in and murmured in her ear. “So you write about sex? Is that it?”

“Yes. No. Um ...” Damn, he flustered her. Enough she had a hard time gathering her thoughts together to form a response that didn't make her seem crazy. “I write romance, but the loves scenes are written with what we call the door wide open. Meaning there's a play-by-play description of the sexual situations while focusing more on the romance aspect than the

sex. If it was all sex, that would be erotica, which is basically porn. While there's nothing wrong with that, it's not what I write."

"Color me intrigued, Willa. Have you always wanted to be a writer?"

"Yes. It fulfills me in a way nothing else does. It fits me. I mean, it's not a job for the faint of heart, but I guess you could say that about a lot of jobs. It's ruthless and cutthroat. I spend most of my life in a fictional world. But it also means I get to work from home or anywhere as long as I have my laptop."

He picked up a strand of her hair, his fingers rubbing the strand. "And erotic romance, why that genre? What attracted you to it?"

She stared and swallowed past her anxiety. Her heart pounded. She smelled him, this earthy, woody cologne that ignited a fire in her blood. His ruggedly handsome face was close. Kissably close. As if she was the only one he cared about in the bar. He couldn't know what his undivided attention did to her because she'd never had a guy act this invested in her. Ever. Not even in high school.

And something inside her shifted. For whatever reason, this gorgeous hunk wanted *her*. She couldn't begin to figure out why. But she decided at that moment that if he wanted her that badly and asked her up to his room, she would go.

The decision washed over her and allowed her to relax. Her smile came easier. She wouldn't pretend she wasn't interested. Because she was too aware of him and her body's response to his nearness. She was primed and ready. When would she ever have another opportunity with such a gorgeous hunk of man meat?

She leaned in and whispered, "Because I enjoy being dominated in the bedroom. And through my writing, I've unearthed my fantasies and put them on paper."

She retreated slightly.

Lust shrouded Jake's features. He stared at her mouth with such rabid hunger she quivered low in her belly. "And how

many of those fantasies have you acted out?”

“A few,” she admitted, but it was only because of her membership at *The Eros Pit*. “But I’ve written twenty-four books, and each one has at least five love scenes that are all different.”

His gaze hooded further. His voice deepened, turned gravelly with desire. “You have a lot of fantasies to work through.”

Air shuddered from her lungs. “Yes. I do.”

“Tell me one.”

She glanced around the bar, worried someone might overhear. But everyone was lost in their own worlds.

“No one’s paying attention to us. Tell me.”

The demand skittered along her spine. He might not be a typical dominant from her club, but he was all alpha. And the submissive inside her recognized his inherent command.

She licked her lips. “I have this one where my partner is eating me out, edging me, until I’m writhing and begging him to fuck me. Then, and only then, he not only fucks me, but uses me for his pleasure like I’m his toy.”

“Fuck, sugar. Come with me.”

“Where?” She swallowed, even though she knew. Her panties were soaked. Desire swirled in a cacophony. And her ovaries cheered like they were at a rave.

“My room.” He stood and tossed a few bills on the bar, more than enough to cover both of their drinks. Then he held out his hand.

This wasn't something Willa typically did—engage in a one-night stand. She was a wallflower, even at *The Eros Pit*. She preferred eschewing the limelight. It was why she loved writing, or one of the reasons, because she didn't have the spotlight turned her way.

When would she ever have another chance to be loved by a man like Jake? He was clearly aroused by her admission. She wrote her fantasies out in fictional stories for the world to read. And she hid behind them as fiction. But the reality was, she pulled the deepest, darkest parts of herself out for the world to see.

Willa knew without a doubt she would never get another opportunity like this. Because stuff like this just didn't happen for her.

She might regret it. But the carnal heat in Jake's eyes was enough to set her clothes on fire. She'd bet a night in his arms would be worthy of remembrance. One where she could live out her fantasies with someone with whom she felt an intrinsic connection.

And it's why she slid her hand into his much larger one, the palm rough and calloused but so strong it left her weak-kneed.

Carnal victory illuminated his ravenous visage. Jake's expression broadcast that he planned to eat her up one sinful bite at a time and she would thank him for it when he finished.

A one-night stand hadn't been in the ballpark of her agenda for the weekend conference. But she was here for it.

Her entire body throbbed in exquisite anticipation. He might not be a Dom from *The Eros Pit*. But she'd never been this attracted or felt a man's magnetic presence quite like she did Jake's.

Intense desire rode her body. And he'd barely touched her. Would she survive a night with him? Or would she spontaneously combust from the intensity of desire?

Jake didn't say a word. With her hand firmly clasped within his, he led her from the bar through the main area where people were partying. The din of voices was a dull roar, and he escorted her to the bank of elevators, pressing the call button.

Her breath shuddered in her lungs. Every atom inside her was thoroughly attuned to the man at her side.

Luckily, they didn't wait more than thirty seconds before the elevator doors slid open on a quiet ding. Jake tugged her onto the vacant elevator.

The moment the doors shut behind them, he backed her up against the wall. His mouth hovered an inch from hers. Carnal black pools illuminated his gaze, mesmerizing her. He towered over her. For once in her life, she felt dainty and feminine and more desired than ever.

His rough, muscular hands slid up her arms, over her shoulders, and cupped her face. Shivers flared at his touch. Her sex was wet and pulsing for him. Jake's thumb scraped over her bottom lip. Aching to taste him, she darted her tongue out and licked his thumb, catching a hint of his flavor, and it fueled her hunger for more.

On a rough male groan, he slammed his lips over hers.

And holy god!

Willa had an out-of-body experience. She'd never known a kiss could make her feel this way. Passion enflamed her being. Pleasure thrummed. Need rocked her to her core. This man's kiss was the way a kiss should be. She'd fantasized about it.

She'd written about it. But never in a million years had she ever believed she would experience it firsthand.

Her entire body melted. Jake ate hungrily at her mouth as if he'd waited his entire existence to kiss her. It was like she belonged to him. And in the dark recesses of her soul, she wanted to be his for longer than one night. It wouldn't happen. But she would take what she could get.

The elevator dinged that they had arrived at his floor. Breathing heavily, Jake tore his mouth away. His fierce gaze made her sizzle.

Before the doors closed, he ushered her out, his palm against her low back in a sign of possessive ownership she felt down to her toes. Willa's body vibrated. Need hummed. And his hand on her back had tingles shooting into her core. She'd never been this aroused in her life.

It was a damn Greek tragedy that this would only be for tonight.

He steered her to his hotel door. "Last chance, sugar." He held up his keycard. "I get you inside, I doubt I'll be able to stop. If you don't want this, tell me now, and I'll escort you to your room."

Willa swallowed any misgivings. Not want him? She'd have to be dead to not want him. It was like asking if she wanted air to breathe.

Because she didn't want any misunderstandings, she stepped into him until their chests brushed together. Her gaze dipped to his sinful mouth and then lifted back to his quixotic eyes. Their heated connection zapped through her. "I won't want you to stop ... Sir."

At her reply, Jake wasted no time. He shoved her inside the room. Before the door swung shut, his mouth claimed her lips. And those strong, capable hands delved into her hair, holding her mouth steady. With lips, tongue, and even his teeth, Jake plundered her very soul.

He walked her deeper into the hotel room, never lifting his mouth, until the backs of her thighs brushed against the

mattress. Her fingers went to the buttons on his dress shirt. Desperation fueled her movements. She tugged and fought with each one.

Jake attacked her dress, dragging the zipper down her back. He shoved the straps down until the material slithered to the floor. Until she stood before him in only her bra and panties. At least she wore a matching set that played up her assets.

Willa whimpered when she finally slid her hands beneath the fabric of his shirt, drew it off, and touched his naked chest. Heat blasted through her. Jake's chest had been carved from marble. There wasn't an ounce of fat on him. And heaven help her, he had a six-pack. Willa felt like she'd hit the jackpot. She wanted to run her tongue over every ridge.

Jake lifted his mouth, and the way he stared had her knees trembling. "Christ, you're gorgeous."

There was no mocking or malice behind the statement. At his voracious stare, she sighed. "So are you."

Willa reached for the clasp on his jeans, aching to see all of him. She wanted to give him pleasure. She wanted to be the one woman he would think about years later. Quite simply, she wanted to rock his world.

She clawed at his zipper. When it was undone, she shoved his slacks over his hips, marveling at his toned, muscular thighs. Damn, even his knees were sexy as fuck. But her gaze zeroed in on the outline of his hard shaft as it strained against his black boxers. She drew the soft material down, letting his erect cock spring free. His rod was long and thick enough her fingers didn't meet as she circled him. The silken head was ruddy, with pre-cum dripping from the slit.

Willa's natural submissive instincts kicked in. Gracefully, she slid to the floor beside the bed, glancing up at Jake's long, muscular frame.

"May I?" she panted, her chest heaving with the force it took to draw breath into her lungs.

She didn't know how it was possible, but his gaze darkened further until they were obsidian.

"I've wanted to see what those lush lips of yours look like around my dick from the moment you sat beside me. I'll never turn down a blow job from you, sugar. Go on. Suck it."

With her gaze trained on his face, she leaned in and swiped her tongue along his slit. Thrilled at his dark hiss of pleasure. Willa yearned to make him feel good. If for no other reason than he picked her tonight. She wasn't under any delusions. She knew what she looked like. She wasn't the woman a man like him committed to for the long haul. He'd wind up with some bleach-blonde chick with big tits and a size zero waist.

But for one night, he was hers. And she'd make every second count.

Opening her mouth, she enveloped the head, taking him inside. She moaned at his musky flavor. Sliding her tongue along his shaft, she sucked him down. If there was one thing she was skilled at in the bedroom, it was giving blow jobs.

She opened her jaw as wide as it would go. Pushing past her gag reflex, his length inched deeper into her throat, cutting off her air supply until his full length was buried in her mouth.

"Oh, Jesus fuck, sugar! Christ, you've got the sexiest fucking mouth."

She released him, drawing back and inhaling a deep breath before repeating the move.

"That's it. Take all of me." He gripped her hair. She kept her gaze trained on his face. Lust thundered across his features.

"I was right. Your mouth looks sexy as fuck around my dick. Take off the bra." His command sizzled along her nerve endings. With her mouth still gliding up and down his cock, she reached behind her back and unclasped her bra.

The material slackened. She tugged the garment off, tossing it behind her. But her mouth never stopped moving over his length. She was hungry for his dick. Willa loved

sucking cock. It was one of her favorite pastimes. And she didn't get to do it as often as she would like.

“You're so goddamn sexy. I'm going to take my time sucking on those gorgeous tits. And then I'm going to eat your pussy until you're begging me to come. And only then will I give you my cock.”

She moaned around his shaft at the naughty picture he painted.

Willa cupped his heavy testes, rolling and squeezing them in her hand while loving his staff with her mouth. She took him deep and released him long enough to say, “Fuck my mouth, Sir.”

Jake growled. “I don't know why, but I fucking love hearing you call me that, sugar.”

He gripped the sides of her head, then pumped his cock in her mouth. She kept her eyes glued to his face, loving the dark play of emotions and passion riding his features. She'd thought he was handsome in the bar. But seeing him like this blew that image out of the water. This was the real him stripped down and on fire from her touch.

Arousal curled in her belly. She slicked a hand down her stomach and beneath her panties. Then rubbed her fingers through her drenched slit.

Jake removed his cock from her mouth and gripped her wrist, yanking it out of her panties. “You don't get to play with yourself unless I say so, and this pussy is mine tonight.”

He sucked the fingers coated with her dew into his mouth and groaned, a deep, rumbling sound that vibrated through her chest. “Fuck, you taste so sweet.”

When she reached for his cock to resume the blow job, he caught her hand. He hauled her to her feet, and she gasped at his strength, at the way he manhandled her. And she loved it, loved that her size wasn't a turnoff, that he acted as if she weighed next to nothing. He lifted her until her legs were wrapped around his waist. Then laid her on the bed with her legs dangling over the edge.

Jake leaned over her. He swooped down and caught a protruding bud, sucking the areola into his mouth. She slid her hands into his inky hair and arched her back, feeding him more of the mound.

“Jake,” she moaned as his wicked mouth suckled on her nipple.

He lifted his mouth. “What happened to Sir?”

“Is that what you want me to call you?” She’d call him whatever he wanted as long as he didn’t stop.

“Yes. I fucking adore it. It makes me want to do bad, bad things with you.”

Oh god, he couldn’t be real. She had to be dreaming. Because he was perfect. “Do them, Sir. I want you to.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” he growled in warning.

Jake yanked her body closer to the edge. The move had him wedging his big body between her thighs. She bit her bottom lip at the glorious sight of him, naked and aroused and staring at her with something akin to sinful wonder. One hand gripped her panties and wrenched the fabric. The flimsy lace material ripped like tissue paper. He tugged the tattered remnants from her body and tossed it behind him, where it fluttered to the floor.

Jake knelt between her parted thighs until his head and, more importantly, his mouth, hovered above her sex. He pushed her legs further apart, stretching them near the point of pain.

“Damn, sugar, you’re already drenched for me.” He murmured the last word with a dark growl.

Willa watched his mouth descend. Her core clenched in anticipation. His tongue darted out and lapped at her clit. He groaned. “Fuck, you taste so sweet. I could eat this pussy all night long and not get tired of it.”

She opened her mouth to reply at the same time he plunged his tongue inside her pussy. And she emitted a gargled moan. Pleasure lanced through her. She undulated her hips at the swath of bliss. Oh god, how was he this good? How did he know just the right spots to hit that would catapult her to the moon?

Jake explored her pussy. Lazily drew circles around her clit before sucking the swollen nub into his mouth and grazing

it with his teeth. But then he released her clit and thrust his tongue inside her sheath, fucking her with it.

She whimpered at the tidal wave as it swelled inside her.

The intense pleasure coiled tighter and tighter in her midsection. She threaded her fingers through his feather-soft hair and held on tight. She ground her pussy against his torrid mouth. Jake was relentless in his pursuit of driving her out of her mind with ecstasy.

He acted like he wasn't in a hurry.

“Please, Sir, make me come.”

“Not yet. Give me more. I fucking love the little sounds you make.”

He added his fingers into the mix while he sucked at her clit. He stirred his fingers through her crease. Then slid two inside her pussy, thrusting deep, curling up and rubbing against the cluster of nerves. And she wondered briefly if she would survive a night in bed with Jake. Or if she would become so addicted to his wicked brand of lovemaking that no other man would ever measure up to him. She could spend every night at *The Eros Pit* for two months solid and still not find a Dom who measured up to Jake.

One of his fingers grazed her back door entrance, just a light, exploratory caress. And she lost her damn mind, moaning, “Sir.”

Willa writhed when he did it again.

He lifted his mouth while pumping his fingers into her sheath. “Have you ever had a man take you back here?”

His finger teased her anus once more.

“Yes. I love it. I have lube ...” She trailed off and wailed because he attacked her pussy like it was his life's goal to make her come screaming.

He speared her flesh and bit down on her clit.

Willa's body rocketed off planet as the orgasm ripped through her. She wailed, “Sir!”

But he didn't give her body time to recuperate. He rose to his full height and filched a condom from his pants on the floor. He stood between her spread thighs and rolled the condom down his impressive length. "Before I fuck your sweet pussy, where's the lube?"

"In my purse."

"Stay," he commanded. Jake retreated to where she'd dropped her purse on the floor. He carried it to the bed. "Take it out and put it on the bed."

Willa wasted no time, her body engulfed in flames of exquisite need. She wanted him to take her everywhere. Every single one of her holes deserved to experience Jake. She yanked the travel-sized tube out and tossed it on the bed beside her. And even grabbed the strip of condoms she always carried in her bag because she was a big fan of being prepared and tossed them beside the lube.

Jake's gaze turned downright lewd. "Someone likes being a naughty girl."

"Don't act like you aren't benefiting from my bedroom tastes."

He pressed her back against the bed, forcing her legs wide. "Are you kidding me, sugar? I fucking love it. And we're going to use every single one of those condoms tonight. You'll find out what it means to fuck a professional athlete."

He gripped his cock, drawing it through her folds, up and down, until she wanted to tear her hair out. Finally, Willa did something that shocked even her. She reached between them and spread her labia. "See how wet I am for you. Don't you want to put that big cock inside me?"

With a savage grunt, Jake pressed the head against her entrance. "Jesus, I'm not even half an inch in, and your pussy's already attempting to draw my dick inside you. Are you that hungry for my cock, sugar?"

"Yes, Sir." She squirmed, but he held himself aloft. The dratted man was playing with her. And it was driving her

crazy. Even though he'd given her a screaming orgasm, she was a glutton and ached to feel him filling her.

"Then take me." Jake thrust slowly as he stuffed her with his dick. Her mouth rounded, and moans spilled forth. He was massive, not just in length, but girth.

He advanced further. Deeper. Stretched her pussy wider.

Holy shit! Willa wasn't prepared for how tremendous he would feel. Rocking his hips, he thrust until his balls smacked against her butt. Jake propped himself up with an arm planted on the bed beside her shoulder while the other stayed at her hip.

"Fuck, you feel so good, sugar. Your pussy is snug and squeezing my dick like it doesn't want me to leave."

She caressed his steely chest, amazed that she got to touch such a fine specimen of manhood. He was fucking ripped. And more powerful than any man she'd ever been with. But she had a few surprises up her sleeve. She flexed her Kegels and circled her hips.

"Oh, fuck."

"Do you like that, Sir?" She did it again.

He crowded against her. Drew his hips back and slammed inside her. The force bowed her back, and she clung to him as he repeated the move.

Beside her ear, he murmured, "Do it again, sugar. Let me feel your cunt clutching my cock."

At his growled command, Willa complied. And that's when Jake began to truly fuck her. He established a brutal pace. The bed thumped against the wall, notifying whoever was in the room next to his that they were getting it on.

But Willa didn't mind. A part of her loved knowing that other people could hear them fuck. And Jake fucked with single-minded determination.

Still locked inside her, he rose to his full height. Holding her thighs, he brutally rammed his cock into her sheath. She

clawed at the bedding and undulated, meeting his torrid thrusts.

“Fuck, you’re gorgeous. And after you come on my cock, I’m going to take your ass.”

He pistoned inside her. But what sent her hurtling over the edge was when he reached between them and pinched her swollen clit. Sparks erupted in a torrent of ecstasy that set her off.

Her toes curled at the orgasmic bliss. Her back bowed while her pussy spasmed around his shaft. And she wailed, “Sir!”

He kept fucking her through the climax until her pussy relaxed and flutters subsided. “Get on your hands and knees in the center of the bed.”

He withdrew his shaft. His face was dark with lust. But he was alpha through and through, his brows scrunched in wicked determination.

Willa scrambled to obey and moved into position. She lowered her face to her forearms and felt him come up behind her. Those massive, powerful hands massaged her ass and parted the globes. Then he added a cool dollop of lube and pressed his finger against her back door entrance.

Willa had done anal enough that she simply relaxed into it, letting him stretch her with his fingers. Every nerve ending had awakened. Pleasure coursed through her, and she tilted her hips up for more.

“Fuck, look at the way your ass takes my fingers.”

With a whimper, she begged, “I want your cock, Sir. Fuck my ass hard.”

“What a dirty fucking girl. But you’re a woman after my own heart. Because there are so many things I want to do to this gorgeous body.”

“Do them. But just fuck my ass already.”

He swore. Coated her entrance with more lube. At the press of his shaft against her anus, she groaned low. God, she

loved anal. It revved her engine unlike anything else.

Jake thrust slowly and retreated. Stretching her ass, driving an inch deeper with every thrust. He murmured, "Fuck, your ass is so tight."

Willa rocked her hips, needing movement, desperate for friction.

But Jake leaned over her back and circled her neck with a hand. "Now, there'll be none of that. I'm going to fuck your ass hard. If something hurts, say stop, and everything will stop. Got it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Jesus, you don't know what hearing that does to me. But you're about to find out."

Holding her neck, he drew his hips back and slammed home with a dark grunt. "Fuck, it's like gliding my dick through hot velvet."

Jake drove inside her. His hips beat a rhythm against her rear as he fucked her ass. She loved every depraved second of his rutting. He was ruining her. No other man would ever satisfy her the way Jake did. Yet she couldn't help herself, thrusting her hips as much as he allowed, greedy for more.

God, how would she ever give him up?

"Play with your pussy and make yourself come," he demanded, thrusting so deep she practically felt his cock in the back of her throat.

She slid her hand beneath her and between her thighs, strumming her fingers against her swollen clit, rubbing furious circles. His grunts and groans competed with her moans. Sweat slicked their forms. And her climax was back-building, approaching in sonic waves bent on obliterating her.

He drove her hips down to the bed and turned fucking savage. They weren't simply fucking anymore. Their sex was primal. He dominated her with his big body and his hand around her neck.

She had never felt so owned. And deep in her heart, she wished for the unattainable—to be his in truth. Because she'd never had a man master her body this way. She could live a hundred lifetimes and never find it again.

“You make me want to keep you.” He grunted and plunged deep, emitting a guttural groan as he came.

His climax spurred hers. Between one breath and the next, her body achieved nuclear fusion as she came in unending waves of profound ecstasy. Her orgasm ripped her to shreds until she went limp and wondered if she would be able to move.

Jake collapsed against her back. His heavy weight pressed her into the mattress. Their breathing was ragged as they fought to come down from the excessive blissful high. His hand still gripped her neck. And Willa wanted to curl into him and stay like this forever.

But she couldn't think that way. Danger lay down that path. Her heart wasn't strong enough to even consider permanence. And after everything, it would destroy her.

Jake pressed a brief kiss against her shoulder blade and lifted himself up, withdrawing his shaft. But before she could mourn the loss of him, he gathered her close so they faced one another and were an inch apart. He had specs of gold amid the dark twilight in his eyes.

He cupped her cheek, gently stroking her skin with his thumb. “You're an amazing woman, Willa. Stay the night. I'm not done with you yet. Let me help you work through some of those fantasies of yours.”

She shouldn't. She knew deep down that way would lead to pain and suffering. But her mouth had disconnected from her brain. “Well, we do have quite a few condoms we haven't used yet.”

He flashed her a seductive smirk and then kissed her. He kissed her like he never planned on letting her go. And she wanted to be kept by him.

“You won’t be sorry you did. I’m going to make you come so many times tonight, I’ll ruin you for other men.”

She wasn’t going to admit that he already had. And as she surrendered, she knew this was a night that would live with her. She would remember the way he made her feel.

And it had to be enough. He wasn’t hers to keep. A professional athlete at the top of his game didn’t date women who looked like Willa.

Willa woke with rays of sunshine peeping through the curtains. Beside her, Jake lay sprawled face down, breathing deep and lightly snoring. She sighed quietly to herself at the picture he painted. He was everything she wanted in a man, but he couldn't be hers.

She ached to touch him again, to run her palm down his back. When he promised her a plethora of orgasms last night, he exceeded her expectations. Her thighs were sore. Peering down at her naked form, she spied bruises on her hips. Those she earned when he screwed her brains out that last time. She had beard burn between her thighs from his scruff. Her body ached from the carnal indulgences but in the best way.

But if she touched him, he would wake. And then she wouldn't do what she needed to for herself—leave. She wasn't cut out for a man like him.

If she stayed, he would convince her to see him again. He'd hinted at the prospect all night. Growling when he was balls deep that he intended to keep her. That he wanted her for all his nights.

His impassioned words hit far too close to home. It rocked her heart and warmed her soul. She wasn't strong enough to say no, not when she felt the same. Just gazing at his naked back, she was hard-pressed to stay away.

But being with him long-term would break her. And not in the fun, he just took a paddle to her ass type of way.

With utmost care, she crept from the bed, double-checking the moment her feet hit the carpeted floor that she didn't wake him. When he didn't move, she tiptoed around the room, picking up her clothing. Her panties were a total loss. But it had been more than worth it.

She donned her bra and dress, stuffing her panties in her purse. They would wind up a memento from this weekend. Something to remember him and one of the best nights of her life by.

She took her phone out and snapped a photo of him sprawled sexily in bed, completely oblivious. He was so handsome he made her ache. She wanted to kiss him goodbye. Thank him for the hottest night of her life.

But she did none of those things. Carrying her heels in one hand with her purse strap over her shoulder, she blew him a kiss he would never know she'd sent him. He would be the hero she always wrote. After last night, no other man would ever measure up.

Then, as silently as possible, she exited his room. She slipped her heels on in the hall when she reached the elevator, which took her to her room three floors up.

It wasn't until she reached her room that she realized she hadn't left him her phone number. But then, what would be the point? Last night had been a one-night stand. Leaving her number flew in the face of the one-night stand creed. And she nixed writing her number on a piece of hotel paper and sliding it beneath his door. That screamed of desperation, especially after her vanishing act.

Her night with Jake was done, and it was time for her to move on.

Willa sighed when she glanced at the alarm clock beside her bed. She had a nine o'clock workshop presentation. It was already quarter to seven. Instead of crawling into bed for some shut-eye, she put in an order for room service and hopped in the shower while she waited for breakfast.



Jake woke, stretching the kinks out of his body, and reached for his guest. Willa was the most amazing woman. He wanted to ask her to meet up with him tonight after the game. He wanted a whole lot more than that, if he was honest. Dating long distance would be problematic. But he had a few months off coming up. He could rent a furnished place in Denver for a month and see where things between them went. And he could always find a local gym in Denver to keep up his training.

When his hand came up empty, he frowned. The space beside him was cold, like it had been vacant for a while.

His eyes snapped open. His gaze darted around and searched the room as he rose into a sitting position. The bathroom door was open, and it was dark inside the room. Her clothes and purse were gone. The only thing that remained from their carnal excesses were a few ripped foil condom wrappers.

She left. And didn't even tell him goodbye?

What the fuck? He searched the bedside table and dresser. She didn't leave her number. He gritted his teeth. Boy, if the media saw him now, they'd laugh their fucking asses off.

Because Jake Fletcher, the bad boy rake of baseball, had been ghosted after the hottest night of his life.

And he didn't even know her last name.

All he knew was that she was a writer at the conference. Which meant she would be here again tonight after the game. He'd find her. And he'd give her shit for ghosting him while enticing her back up to his room.

He needed to buy more condoms since they'd used up the entire sleeve. But he knew the dark, lusty place where she lived and just how sensual she was in bed. He'd use that knowledge against her and make her addicted to his cock.

Glancing at the clock, he swore at the time.

Shit.

He couldn't worry about Willa. It was time to get ready for the biggest game of his life. And he had to get himself mentally prepared. They had practice and media interviews all day long.

But as he headed into the shower, he couldn't expel the images from the previous night. She'd accomplished a feat no other woman had ever done before. Because she'd stuck with him. Above and beyond all the nameless and faceless women he had taken to bed, not a single one stood out among the crowd—except Willa.

She might not know it yet, but he was playing for keeps.

That night, Jake stood in line with his teammates on the side of the field as mega popstar Kelly Whitley sang the national anthem. As much as he had tried, he couldn't banish Willa from his mind. And win or lose, he wasn't sticking around the ballpark after his obligations were met.

Even if he had to walk back to his hotel, he would do it and find her. If it meant he had to ask every single person at the writers' conference where he could find Willa, he would.

But he'd start first with Nocturne.

They took the field at the top of the first. Ishii was on the mound tonight. The Japanese transplant was two years younger than Jake and at the top of his game. He and Ishii worked like peanut butter and jelly.

In the first inning, they kept the Howlers from scoring a base hit. By the second inning, he believed they would pull this game off.

But in the third inning, Phelps made an error at second base, and Houston was up by two.

In the fifth inning, Harrison hit a straight-line double and tied the game.

He loved baseball. When he looked into his future, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do after he retired. He could coach. The front office was making rumblings about hiring him after he retired while offering him a multi-year contract to potentially finish out his career playing for them.

But all of it was a moot point if he couldn't have Willa.

Why had she left without saying goodbye?

He threw out a runner at second in the bottom of the seventh to end the inning. All they had to do was score one hit, and they would win. But the two teams proved how evenly matched they were with the tied game.

The roar and boos of the fans were background noise. In the bottom of the seventh, they got a pair of base hits to put runners on first and second. But a pop-out fly into center field ended the inning without their team scoring.

In the top of the eighth, the relief pitcher Henry was put in. Even with Ishii putting up a stink in the dugout that he could finish the game, that his arm was great and he had more in the tank, Coach Davis yanked him.

Behind home plate, he had a bird's-eye view of the field. Henry struck out the first batter. One down, two to go. But the next player at bat hit a line drive and scored a double. Jake signaled Henry the sign for him to brush it off and let it the fuck go.

The next player at bat, Henry wound up walking.

Rising from his crouch, he called time, heading to the mound. Henry couldn't always maintain a level head.

"Hey, you okay?" Jake assessed him. His jaw was tightly clenched, and Jake could see the nervous tick.

Henry blew out his breath, stress etched over his features. "Yeah. I got this."

"You sure? If it's too much, we can put Parker in. He's warmed up and raring to go." Nolan Parker was their Cy Young closer and one of the best in the game. If there was anyone he trusted to come in and pitch the game of his life, it was him.

"I can finish the inning."

Jake studied him. If he said he was good, then he had to trust him. "Stick with strikes on the inside corner pocket. This

team loves going for the high and fast pitches. You keep it inside, you'll strike 'em out.”

“Got it.” Henry nodded, determination settled over his features.

Jake marched back to home plate. He'd done the best he could for the guy and their team. Whatever happened next, it was fate. He knelt behind home plate as the Goliath hitter of the Howlers approached the plate. At six-two and two hundred forty pounds of pure muscle, Kinson was a homerun derby champ.

Henry's first pitch was a strike on the inside corner pocket, just like he had instructed him. The second pitch was a sinker. Kinson clipped it back for a foul ball. The third pitch was a high ball.

Jesus. Henry needed to settle the fuck down. He knew this was the biggest game of all their careers. Jake scanned the runners at first and second. They were poised to run if Kinson got a hit. It would be up to him to stop the runner at second from crossing the plate and scoring the winning run.

Focused on Henry, Jake went through hand signals for the type of pitch he wanted him to throw. Henry nodded when he displayed the signal for a slider.

Unease settled into his gut. Henry's slider wasn't always reliable. Jake held his glove out, then flicked his gaze to the runners on first and second. The pitch counter ticked by. The crowd held its collective breath, and sweat rolled down Jake's back. Henry wound up for the pitch, aimed, and fired. And his slider went directly over home plate through the strike zone instead of sinking right before it reached the plate. Kinson swung with all his might, all two hundred and forty pounds of torque behind his swing. His bat connected. The loud crack of the impact settled over Jake, and his heart dropped into his stomach. After this many years behind the plate, he knew what that sound meant.

And he watched the ball take flight higher and higher, soaring into the upper deck. The crowd rose to their feet. The stadium held its breath as the ball soared through the air.

The ball landed over the wall on the stadium's second level, and the crowd went berserk. Home run.

Kinson scored a three-run home run to put the Howlers on top.

Henry hung his head. Deep in Jake's gut, he knew the game was lost. He knew it to the furthest depths of his soul. While he was sad over losing his chance at being crowned a world champion, not everything that happened in Houston had been bad.

Because he'd met her—Willa.

His Willa.

Or she would be before the night was over.

During the final inning and a half, his team played their hearts out. But in the end, they fell short and lost.

Jake didn't linger on the field for postgame interviews. He beelined for the locker room and showers. He avoided the media, in no mood to discuss tonight's loss. The only thing that concerned him now was reaching the hotel and finding his Willa.

After the long day at the conference, Willa and her friends were sipping margaritas and sharing the last of the queso dip at San Juan Cantina a few blocks away from the Vivaldi.

“Okay, spill. You keep blushing any time you look at the game.” Mel’s suspicious gleam made Willa uncomfortable. Mel looked cute in her trendy hipster jeans and off-the-shoulder top in soft pink. Her blonde bob edged sassily along her angular jaw.

She shifted in her seat, trying to think up an explanation where she didn’t divulge all the deets when Vanessa chimed in. Vanessa was tall and slender with a riot of curly black hair. She pursed her lips. “You’re right, Mel. She’s being squirrely. Out with it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Other than she’d experienced the hottest sex of her life with the man on the screen currently crouched behind home plate.

“Sounds like she’s got a man on her brain. Who is it? Is he rooting for the Flashes?” Mel asked with a jerk of her head toward the nearest television.

“She makes a valid point. Unless you’re secretly a gambler and placed a huge bet on one of the teams.”

She glanced between her two author besties. They attended conferences together because these things were a nightmare for her. They were like the Three Musketeers. All for one and one for all. Granted, this time around, she had her own room

because she hadn't decided she was attending right away, and they'd only gotten a room with a king bed. While she loved them, she didn't want to be stuck in the middle between them.

Then she regarded the Mexican restaurant patrons, ensuring she spied no one from their conference nearby.

Leaning in, she whispered, "I had a one-night stand last night."

"What?" Mel's eye grew round as saucers and brows hiked up beneath her bangs.

"And you're just telling us this now?" Vanessa squealed with her mouth open.

"Yeah, I wasn't going to bring it up." Mainly because she kept pinching herself in disbelief that it happened in the first place. She experienced the hottest, most sexually charged night of her life.

And she kept glancing at the screen because Jake was crouched behind home plate. She recognized the fierce determination on his face. It was the same look he had worn when he'd been hilt deep inside her.

"Why not?" Vanessa tilted her head, concern dotting her brow.

"I can't believe I missed watching you hook up with a hottie because I was having drinks with that marketing rep." Mel sighed dejectedly.

"We both missed it. Gah!"

"Tell us everything. Including what he has to do with the baseball game." Mel pointed at Jake.

Her Jake.

Dammit. He wasn't hers and never would be. Just because their connection had been leagues deeper than she'd ever experienced didn't mean a thing. It couldn't.

Because she doubted with the way she'd left his room this morning that he would ever deign to speak to her again. She drank a long sip of her margarita and then divulged the story.

Most of it. They didn't need a play-by-play of their bedroom activities. They didn't need to know how hung Jake was or how much his dirty talk had fueled her lust to epic heights or how she'd been down for anything he wanted to do.

"Holy shit!" Mel exclaimed and slumped back against her chair in awe.

Vanessa bent her head down. "It's official. You're the queen of hookups. We bow before your greatness."

Willa chuckled at their antics. She loved these girls. They had a blast together when they traveled. "I'm not sure about that title. But was leaving that way the right thing to do?"

It had been on her mind all day long. She was lucky she'd been able to focus at all during her workshop presentation.

"Because you like him, like him." Mel wiggled her eyebrows.

Bingo. She wasn't wrong with her assumption. If Willa was writing this story, they'd reached the turning point in the book where the heroine realizes she cares deeply about the hero. And that she'd made a mistake this morning.

"I've got to know. What's he packing?" Vanessa chin nodded toward the television where the camera had zoomed in on him behind the plate.

"Almost too big. Had to be a solid eight—and wide. And he knew how to use it." She couldn't help the involuntary shiver at the memory of all those inches. Willa had never come so hard in her life.

"Girl! I'm officially jealous."

"And you left before he could ask for your number?"

"Come on, you guys. A man like that would never want to be out in public with a woman who looks like me. You know it and I know it." She was a size fourteen and rather average, but still considered plus size in a world and society that idolized size zeros.

"Willa, don't talk about yourself like that," Mel scolded.

“Honey, you’re beautiful.” Vanessa frowned.

She sighed and shook her head because they were both thinner and didn’t get it. “Not when it comes to most of our society.”

“But what if he wanted to be with you beyond last night? What if he wanted to date you?”

Mel’s questions were valid. And Willa couldn’t deny that in her heart of hearts, it was what she craved. “I like Jake. If he had any other job, I could see myself with him long-term. But I can’t handle the constant media attention.”

“You get media attention for your work too. Unless you’re forgetting, Miss *New York Times* bestseller,” Vanessa chimed in with a wry grin.

“I know, but I can hide behind my computer. That”—she gestured toward the screen—“is beyond the online articles I’m interviewed for or the book clubs where I appear virtually or even the book signings. Those I can handle.”

“You know what I think?” Mel tilted her head.

“No, what?”

“I think you’re scared. I think you felt something last night. And you ran.”

Willa winced internally. Bullseye. Mel’s insight hit home. “It was just a one-night stand.”

“And you’re glued to a baseball game because you want to know who wins?” Vanessa stated drolly with an eye roll.

Mel glanced at the television and fanned her face. “Damn. He’s a hottie. If I got a chance to spend the night with him, I wouldn’t leave until he kicked me out of his room.”

“Same.” Vanessa nodded in agreement.

Jealousy slammed into her. She snapped, “But you didn’t spend the night with him. I did.”

“And I rest my case.” Mel smiled wide.

“What?”

“Girl, you’ve got it bad for him. Not that either of us could blame you one bit. Because he’s definitely a hunk of burning love,” Vanessa chimed in.

“Have you looked him up online?”

“Yes.” She had, and she didn’t like what she had found. Jake was a serial womanizer, or at least that’s how the media portrayed him. Although their claims were backed up by multiple photos of him with different women, each one more gorgeous than the last. He’d been linked to a supermodel for a few months. A freaking supermodel!

“And?” Mel asked.

Vanessa held up a finger. “What does the media know, anyway? Did you guys talk about your dating history?”

“Um, not really. We were too busy doing ...” Her cheeks flamed red.

Mel wiggled in her seat like she was riding the chair. “Too busy doing the nasty. We get it.”

“Can we go? I want to reach the hotel before the game ends and pandemonium ensues in the streets.” And she wanted out of the conversation. She adored her friends. She wouldn’t make it through these conferences without them. But she didn’t want to talk about Jake anymore. He was all she’d thought about all damn day. She needed a breather. She needed to forget about him. Although that was easier said than done because he had etched himself on her heart and soul.

Mel and Vanessa glanced at each other with concern at her change of topic, but they didn’t argue. Mel said, “Sure, we can head back to the Vivaldi.”

They paid the check and then walked back to the hotel. In Denver, fall had begun teasing winter’s arrival with a few sparse snowstorms. But in Houston, it was a balmy seventy-eight degrees at nine in the evening. She changed the subject while they walked, talking about all the latest marketing trends in their business.

When they reached the hotel, Mel and Vanessa headed to the evening workshop event. But Willa was peopled out. So

she headed back to Nocturne. She'd booked it for both weekend nights she was here and was thrilled with her foresight. They had the game on too.

She ordered another margarita and watched Jake play. He was intense when he played. There was an intelligence in his eyes as he studied the field and the batters and managed the pitcher on the mound. And here she'd thought he couldn't possibly impress her more. She'd been wrong. The longer she watched him, she came to realize what a powerhouse he was. She cheered when his team scored base hits. And dejectedly sighed when they failed to drive in those runs to break the tie.

And she stared, horrified, as Houston scored three runs in the eighth inning to break the tie. The camera panned to Jake's face. His eyes said it all. He knew the game was over. His team had one inning to change the fate of the game, and chances were slim at best.

But Jake never faltered. He strode out to the mound, met the manager and coaches, and spoke quietly with the pitcher.

They swapped out pitchers on Jake's team. And then he took his position behind the mound, where his team's closer struck out the next two at-bats to end the disastrous inning.

And when the final out was called and Jake's team lost, her heart bled for him.

Jake searched through the bars on the first and second floors after he arrived at the hotel, searching for Willa. He spied a ton of women, but no Willa with her dark hair and flashing eyes. There was one more place he hadn't checked. But he had to speak with the hotel manager first to gain entrance into Nocturne last minute.

The manager schmoozed with the best of them. And Jake used his celebrity status for a change. So he had to autograph a few items for the guy and pose for a few photos. It would be worth it, or so he hoped.

It was close to midnight by the time he sauntered into Nocturne.

He scanned the patrons, searching for long chestnut hair, and grinned the moment he spied her. She wore another dress, this time a stunning cobalt number, and a pair of silver stilettos that left him panting. He wanted to take her wearing only the stilettos and nothing else. Now that his season was finished, his only objective was making her his before the night was over. He didn't simply want tonight. He wanted the promise of a future.

Hell, if things worked out between them, he could get his agent to look into a trade. The Denver Bucks team was a tightly run ship and had made the playoffs this year but had fallen short before the pennant.

There was a spot open on her right. He didn't pay the other patrons any attention. Willa was his sole focus. He prowled

her way, determined to win her.

“Fancy meeting you here,” he murmured by her ear as he sat on the empty barstool beside her.

She gasped and shifted her face, a mixture of emotions from joy to concern filtered through her goddess eyes. “Jake.”

Memories from last night assailed him. She’d moaned his name just like that when he had been balls deep inside her. He was hard instantly. He flexed his hands to keep himself from reaching for her. Because he wanted to pull her onto his lap and kiss her brainless.

He just wanted—her.

“I’m sorry.” She placed her hand over his on the bar. Hope surged, combined with lust, and he was hard-pressed not to toss her over his shoulder and cart her up to his room.

“It’s all right.” He shrugged. In this business, you win some and lose some. It was as simple as that.

“Really?” She didn’t seem convinced by his response. But then, she saw him. Unlike all the other women he’d been with, she saw through all his bullshit to the real Jake. It was part of what made her unique and had him completely entranced.

He noticed her pulse fluttering in her neck and the way her gaze kept dipping to his lips. She wanted him all right. It didn’t explain why she ghosted him this morning. But he’d get to the bottom of it. “Yeah. They played a hell of a game. They beat us square. It’s the nature of the beast.”

“So you’re not sad?”

“Fuck yeah, I am. And I still want to earn the title of world champion. I will too. Just not this year. But I have a few more years left in the tank before I hang up my catcher’s mitt. It’s plenty of time to earn that ring.”

“That’s a remarkably insightful view.”

He caught a whiff of her amber perfume. And it aroused him beyond measure. He was thankful they were sitting, so his erection remained hidden from view. He would never smell anything with amber in it without thinking of her.

“Thought you’d like that. Come with me to my room.” She was so gorgeous he ached with longing. He wanted to touch her. Love her all night long and make her his by the time the sun rose in the morning. And he didn’t care if it took all night to accomplish his goals and convince her to be with him. Jake wouldn’t back down, not when he wanted her with every fiber of his being.



Willa wasn’t shocked he was in Nocturne. She figured he would have picked up another woman. But he’d returned to the scene of their first meeting—for her. Because he wanted her.

Willa’s heart thumped wildly.

Spending another night in his arms might be a mistake. Another night of sinful depravity would only lead to disaster. But she wanted another night with him. She couldn’t put her finger on why, only she had never felt such a deep-seated connection with anyone else before.

But it was the smoldering intensity in his eyes, eyes that looked at her as if she was special, that decided her fate. Taking his hand, a live wire of electricity jolted through her, and she murmured, “Why don’t you come to mine? I’m a girl. We need things.”

Not to mention, she had condoms in her toiletry bag. She’d packed a box of twelve. And remembered laughing at herself over it. Mainly because she was heading to a work event where she wouldn’t be searching for a hookup. But Willa believed in being prepared for any scenario.

Jake’s slow, seductive smile lit her up. A Fourth of July fireworks display had nothing on her. And her girly bits, those little bastards, broke out the streamers and kazoos. Tingling anticipation hummed in her blood.

She wanted this man in a way that defied logic. He gave her all the feels.

Lifting their joined hands, he pressed a kiss to the back of her palm. “Lead the way, sugar.”

Before she could fish out some cash for the bartender to cover her drink, he handed the man a few large bills. “Could we get a bottle of Dom and two glasses?”

“Right away, sir. I can have it delivered to your room.”

He shot her a quizzical glance. His inky brow arched in expectation.

“Room 1014.”

“I’ll have it up to you in ten to fifteen minutes.” The bartender, the same gangly gentleman from the previous night, wore a knowing smile. But Willa didn’t care if he knew they were about to hook up. It wasn’t like she would ever see the man again.

“Great. Appreciate it.” Jake shifted his attention back to Willa. And then he tugged her with him. She dutifully followed.

The trip to the elevator was much the same as last night. With one exception. Tonight, they weren’t strangers. At the elevator, they stood with a group of women who all had lanyards with their nametags on them. They were authors, although none that she knew personally.

When the lift arrived, Jake pulled her into the back of the elevator after pressing the button for the tenth floor. He pulled her against him so her backside was pressed against his front. And she felt all of him. She was talking every single hard inch.

Her pussy throbbed, aching to feel him inside her again.

He circled her body with his muscular arms, making them appear to be a real couple. One of the women, a tall, lanky blonde with legs for days and a killer complexion, sneered in their direction.

Willa sucked in a jagged breath. That look was a smack across her face. Because she knew what the blonde thought staring at the two of them. Why was he with Willa and not someone like her?

Because they didn't make sense. Granted, the sex was off the charts. The best she'd ever had. And her ovaries were cheering his name at the forthcoming pleasure. But in the real world, when they returned to their lives after this weekend, they wouldn't mesh. She certainly wouldn't fit into his world.

Although he might fit into hers. She could picture him at *The Eros Pit* speaking with other Doms. And while he didn't classify himself as a Dominant, he had the bearing and control of one. It was what attracted her to him in the first place.

Willa would never be someone who enjoyed strictly vanilla sex. She needed more in the bedroom. And Jake fulfilled every one of her naughty fantasies.

The blonde sneered with a shake of her head as they departed the elevator. It made her want to cave into herself. It always did. She hated how much it stung to be viewed as less than because she wasn't a standard size. But when people did it to you all your life, the wounds grew deeper. And every time shade was thrown her way, it was like acid tossed onto the wounds, ensuring they never fully healed.

Jake pressed the door open button. "Is there a problem?"

The woman sputtered at his blunt question. "Um, no."

"Are you sure? Because it looked to me like you were disrespecting my woman."

The blonde's jaw dropped open, the opening wide enough cruise ships could sail through. Hers would have done the same, except she was stunned. He'd stood up for her. No one had ever done that before.

Fear entered the gal's terrified eyes. "N-n-no, it's just been a long day."

"Whatever, lady. Don't let me catch you doing it again." Jake released the door open button, allowing the doors to slide closed, resuming their ascent to the tenth floor.

Willa shifted, rotating her body until she stared at him. "No one has ever done that before."

"Done what? Been a complete bitch to you?"

She shook her head, awe suffusing every pore. “No. Stood up for me like that.”

How could he be this perfect? Had she died and entered the pearly gates?

And then she launched herself at him. Sealing her mouth over his, she poured her rioting emotions into her kiss. Jake’s hands threaded into her hair, holding her prisoner against his mouth. But god, if there ever was a place she wouldn’t mind being a prisoner, it was in his arms.

The elevator dinged that they had arrived at the tenth floor.

Jake ended the kiss. She lifted her lids, and Willa felt herself falling into him. This man did things to her no other guy had ever done before. And she should be worried about the hold he had on her. It was like he’d performed hoodoo with his dick. And it gave new meaning to the phrase being dicked over.

He caught the doors before they shut and dragged her out of the elevator. Not that she put up a fight. If anything, she rushed out and wound up tugging him along behind her. Although he was two steps behind her the entire way.

Luckily, her room wasn’t far from the elevator.

He took the key from her hand and opened the door. “After you, sugar.”

Willa didn’t think she would ever get tired of the way he lustfully murmured that endearment. His voice almost purred it with a Southern drawl, and her panties went wet instantly.

Where Jake was concerned, she was in big trouble—because she selfishly wanted to keep him.

Jake ushered her into the room. Not two seconds after he closed the door, there was a knock, and the person on the other side announced, “Room service.”

Jake propped open the door and accepted the champagne and glasses with a smile, handing them a generous tip. Then he hung the privacy door hanger on the handle before shutting the door and locking it. Locking them inside.

Willa headed into the bathroom and returned holding another strip of condoms. “I love the way you think, woman.”

He prowled into her room, taking note of the feminine items. The pair of black heels lying haphazardly on the floor by the desk. The navy skirt tossed over the chair. But what intrigued him even more were the books stacked on the table. He knew she was an author, but they hadn’t gotten around to delving beyond her genre. But he wanted to know everything about her.

Intrigued, he approached the table. “Are any of these yours?”

Willa clutched her hands together, a frown marring her brow. “One of them. They were in the conference bags for all attendees, so I got a copy of my own book.”

“Which one is yours? I don’t see your name.” And he didn’t like the pensive expression she wore.

She approached and pointed at a book. “That’s my book. My pen name is Miriam Quinn.”

“Why the pen name?”

“Because I wanted a bit of anonymity. I don’t care for the spotlight. And Miriam Quinn doesn’t have a social security number or anything like that. Not that a stalker with a modicum of hacking skills couldn’t figure out who I am. But it provides me with an extra layer of security as a single woman who lives alone. I know authors who’ve had readers show up on their front porch and knock on their door.”

“That’s smart. I want it.” The cover had a woman’s sexy legs featured on it. *Tangled in You* by Miriam Quinn. And he couldn’t help but wonder just how hot the sex scenes were. But he was going to find out.

“Really?” Shock filtered across her beautiful features and settled on consternation. Did she not see how much he admired her? Above her name, it stated she was a *New York Times* bestselling author. She wasn’t just an author, but one with clout.

“Yeah, I want to read it.”

“Then you can take it.”

“Will you sign it for me?” He nodded toward the book.

“Why do you want to read it?” Willa’s frown deepened.

That was enough of that. He left the table and prowled her way. He didn’t stop until only an inch of space separated them. “I want to read it and find out how your mind works. I want to know all your fantasies. I want to know your real last name. In fact, I want to know everything about you. And just how dirty is the book?”

He wasn’t lying. Jake wanted to know everything about her. Fascinated didn’t begin to cut it.

Willa blushed profusely. “You could say I put the spice in spicy romance. And it’s Willa Burke.”

God, she was fucking perfect. He wanted to worship her. He wanted to take her home and keep her. Jake wanted her more than he had ever wanted another woman. “It’s mine, and

I want you to sign it. Later.” He cupped her stunning face. “Because I’ve been thinking about these lips all damn day.”

“You were playing in the Championship Series,” she reminded him with a wry grin that arrowed straight to his heart. She was it for him. Every part of his being declared *mine*. Now all he had to do was convince her to give him a chance. Because he was falling for her.

He tilted her head back and stared into her eyes, dropping his shields and allowing her to see the truth. “Exactly. I couldn’t get you out of my mind. Want to know what I thought about?”

She blinked up at him, like she didn’t believe the words but was as caught up in their passionate bond as he. “Yes.”

Victory surged in his blood. “Let’s see. I thought about how much I want to do everything we did last night again. How much I ached to bury myself in your hot pussy. That I’m dying to know every single one of your fantasies. Then spend eternity enacting each and every one, no matter how depraved they might be. Starting now.”

Jake crushed her lips, ravishing her mouth with all the pent-up need pumping through him. With all the women he’d bedded, not a single one had ever made him want to return for seconds or thirds—until Willa. Her hands clutched at his chest. Her nails dug into his skin.

And Jake knew he was sunk.

This was the woman he wanted to kiss for the rest of his life. She was skittish. But he knew he’d change her mind. All he had to do was show her how good it would be, but first, she had to answer for sneaking out this morning.

He ripped his mouth away, then spun Willa around and pushed her torso down against the mattress. He yanked the dress up, exposing the gorgeous globes of her ass, covered by black lacy panties.

“Jake! What are you—”

He whacked her bottom with his palm. “This is for sneaking out this morning without saying goodbye.”

He swatted her butt again. “And for not leaving your phone number behind.”

Needing her bare, he ripped the lace, tugging the material off. “And this is for not leaving your panties behind for me. These belong to me now.” He shoved them in the back pocket of his slacks before resuming the spanking.

Jake didn't hold back either. He was letting her know in no uncertain terms that leaving the way she had was not something he would tolerate in the future. They would have open lines of communication.

“Oh god.” Willa tilted her hips up, seeking his hand, his punishment.

“You like being punished like a dirty little slut, don't you?” he growled, thinking she fit him in every way, satisfying his darker needs. Needs he had never allowed out with another woman.

“Yes,” she whimpered, her face buried against the mattress, muffling her moans.

He leaned over her back and murmured in her ear. “And I bet I know what you like even more than being punished.”

She whimpered into the mattress when he pressed the bulge in his crotch against her rear and rocked his hips, letting her feel how fucking hard he was for her. “You love riding my cock like a dirty little slut.”

“I do.” She panted and rocked her hips, rubbing her lush ass against his crotch.

“Say it, and I might reward you.” Because he was already seconds from plowing inside her.

“I love riding your cock like a dirty little slut, Sir.”

Lust rammed into him like a runner stealing home. It knocked him off his axis and went straight to his groin. He'd never been this way with other women. She engaged a side of himself he always knew existed but had never brought into the light.

At her compliance, he lowered to his knees. Parted the plump globes of her ass. And drew his tongue along her drenched slit from her clit all the way to her back channel entrance.

He ate her pretty cunt, his tongue lapping at her sex. Her sweet musky flavor hit his tongue, and it was his turn to groan. Jake knew he'd found the woman for him. And he was going to show her just how many times she could come in one night. He would imprint himself on her. Make it next level impossible for her to walk away again.

Her cries of pleasure went straight to his dick.

He dawdled, drawing her pleasure out and licking her slowly. Her cream was his newest addiction, one he didn't want a cure for. She had the sweetest pussy. He could spend the rest of the night eating her and making her come.

"Jake. Sir, please," she wailed, her hips rocking and jiggling her gorgeous ass. He clamped his hands down on her waist, holding her steady.

"Tell me what you want, sugar." He darted his tongue out and circled her clit. Satisfaction flowed through him at the stream of moans she emitted.

"To come. Please, Sir," she responded in a breathy alto that went straight to his dick.

"Since you asked so sweetly, I will give you what you need. I want to hear your cries. Don't hold back, or I will be forced to punish you again."

"I'll be too loud. Other people will hear us."

Jake squeezed her ass, leaving his fingerprints behind. He nipped her ass cheek. "I want them to hear you. I want them to know you're getting the fuck of your life. That deep down, you're a naughty little slut who loves being fucked dirty. I want them to see us emerge from the room in the morning and be jealous because they've never had it so good."

"Oh god, yes!" She bucked against his hold.

It was all the encouragement he needed. He turned feral as he lapped at her pussy. Plunging his tongue in her tight sheath, he thrust, fucking her with his tongue. Her cries rose in tenor the closer she was to climaxing. He pressed his thumb against her clit, circling the hard nub.

“Oh god, Jake, that’s it, sir, make me come,” she shouted, and the sound echoed in the room.

He pushed his thumb against her clit. And she exploded, coating his tongue with her cream. Her cries of ecstasy boomed in the room. There was no doubt if the room beside hers was occupied, they were hearing her sharp cries.

And then he rose, ripping his clothes off in the process. For the briefest of moments, he considered taking her without a condom and filling her with his seed. Binding her to him in the most elemental of ways.

Fuck, the thought of her belly rounded with his child filled him with a sense of purpose that went straight to the core of his being.

In the end, he snagged one of the foil packets. Because he didn’t want to force her hand that way. He wanted her to *want* to be with him above all other men. He wanted her to choose him. Not because she had to, but because she wanted to be with him.

He steadied her hips. Gripping his dick, he rubbed it through her swollen folds. At her throaty moan, he teased her even more. Dragging the head up and down her slit, circling her clit and back down again.

“Jake, Sir, please fuck me.”

“There she is, my dirty little slut asking me for what she wants.”

He aligned his cock with her entrance. Grabbed her hips and slammed inside. Their twin groans filled the room. She felt so fucking good. The way her pussy clenched and fluttered around his shaft had his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

“Fuck. Fuck! You feel so good.” He drew back until only the tip remained and drove his shaft inside until his balls

smacked against her clit. And this time, her body welcomed him inside, attempting to pull him even deeper into the hot cavern of her sheath.

“Harder. I want you to fuck me as hard and as brutally as you can and make me come on your cock. But then I want you to come on my tits, Sir.”

Oh shit!

He snarled and started fucking her exactly like she asked. His hips beat a driving rhythm. Flesh smacked against flesh. She swung her hips back, undulating and meeting his thrusts with her own.

Willa was his every fantasy brought to life. He knew in that moment he would never find another woman that suited him this well.

He felt himself nearing the point of no return. His balls tightened, drawing up as pleasure coalesced at the root of his shaft. Then reached around her hip and strummed his fingers over her engorged clit.

“Oh god, Jake!” she wailed. Her pussy clamped down on his cock as she exploded. He thrust again and again, extending her climax.

The moment the flutters subsided, he withdrew and ripped the condom off. And Willa, his gorgeous, carnal, he wanted her to be his forever, Willa, rose off the mattress like a seductive goddess. She turned to face him, then gracefully slid to her knees. She cupped her generous tits, holding them up for him like an offering as he stroked his dick, pulling and twisting his strokes.

It only took a few pumps before his balls drew even more taut. Lightning slashed along his spine and pooled in his groin. On the next pump of his fist, his climax shredded him. Ropes of semen blasted forth from his cock at sonic speeds and landed on her plump tits. Bliss suffused every pore as he came until his balls emptied and her chest was painted with his seed.

Gazing at him with those goddess eyes, she dipped two fingers in his spunk and brought them to her lips. She sucked

those fingers into her mouth and moaned. Then she repeated the movement.

It was the sexiest fucking thing he'd ever witnessed.

He hauled her up and slanted his mouth over hers. Hefting her into his arms, he relocated them onto the bed and felt himself hardening once more. They'd have to open the champagne later. Once he was sated and more in control of his lust. Because all he could think about was being inside her again. And working out his frustration over the game while making her addicted to his cock. It was a win-win in his mind.

She tore her mouth away and murmured, awestruck, "How?"

"It's all you, sugar. I'm not this randy for anyone." Ever.

"I bet you say that to all the women you bed, Jake."

Holding her gaze prisoner, he spoke the truth. "I've never said that before in my life. This is different. You're different."

"In that I'm the first plus-sized woman you've been with?" She teased him with a smile.

Scowling, he scolded her. "Don't talk about yourself like that. You're a gorgeous woman. I wanted you the moment I spied you. And unless you want another spanking, I suggest you stop degrading yourself that way."

"Oh, um, well ... huh." Her consternation was endearing. And it was then that he decided he would help her see what he did every time he looked at her. Because she was a phenomenal woman and gorgeous to boot. She was a fucking unicorn. He would fight off anyone who wanted to take her away from him, including her.

"And this," he rubbed his shaft against her pussy, "is hard again just for you. Anyone else, I would already be out the door."

"Because you're a player."

"I was." He didn't regret his past. Not when every choice he'd made had brought him here to her.

She arched a delicate brow. “But you’re not anymore? Since when?”

“Since I met you.”

Her eyes clouded, and she frowned, shaking her head. “Don’t say things like that.”

“Why not? It’s true.”

She shoved at his chest. “I told you not to say things like that.”

He cupped her face in his hands and watched her bottom lip tremble. This was one of her hang-ups. And he would make her understand that he was all in. That he thought she was the most gorgeous woman inside and out. “Willa. I’ll keep saying those words because I believe them. And I’ll keep saying them until you believe me. I don’t know who made you think you’re not beautiful and deserving of happiness. I’d like to thrash them. Because you light up a room simply by being in it. And you don’t see your beauty, and the effect you have on men, which makes you even more gorgeous. I’ve never wanted another woman the way I want you.”

“Jake.” Her eyes slid shut. A pained expression crossed her features.

“And I’m going to prove it to you.”

Her eyes snapped open. “How?”

“By making love to you the rest of the night.” And then he took her mouth, kissing her with everything she made him feel.

Because his future was on the line.

She inhaled deeply. Awareness returned in stages. His scent surrounded her, along with his big body that had kept her warm all night. And his arms felt like home. She wanted to stay within the circle of them forever. But even Cinderella's time at the ball ended, and so too had her nights in Jake's arms.

Jake pressed a kiss against the back of her neck, stirring against her.

And that wasn't the only part of him that stirred. "Morning, sugar."

"I have to go," she blurted, panic setting in.

He flicked his tongue against that one spot on her neck that made her powerless to resist him. "Not yet. We were up late. We—"

"Jake," she sighed, biting her bottom lip to contain her moan.

He rose behind her and tugged her onto her back. He glared down at her. "Why do I get the feeling I'm not going to like what you're about to say?"

Because he saw her unlike any man ever had. She would miss everything about him. But she cupped his face. "It's time for you to leave and let me go."

Jake scowled. "Why? Do you have more of the conference to attend?"

“Well, no—”

“And do you have a flight you need to catch this morning?”

God, why was he being so difficult? “No, my flight is later this afternoon.”

“Then why do you want to get rid of me at eight in the morning? We have plenty of time. We can go to the airport together. We can grab a bite to eat. We can—”

Her heart painfully squeezed at all the talk of *we*. If she let him continue, the thin shred of resistance she clung to would wither and die and she couldn't allow that to happen. “Jake, there's no *we*. I have to pack and get ready to fly home and return to my life. And you've got to go to yours.”

He glowered with thunderclouds in his eyes and snarled. “That's bullshit, and you know it. And I can prove it to you.”

Jake kissed her. Hungrily sealed his lips over hers in a world-altering kiss that spun her head and made her wet. And because she was weak for this man, she surrendered to his incendiary heat. How could she not? They would never see each other again. It broke her heart into a million pieces. But she didn't belong in his world. She couldn't withstand the side-eye glances without it decimating her heart and soul.

She kissed him back with everything she felt. In another life, she would have given him every part of her being. He was everything she wanted, everything she craved. But she didn't get to keep him.

Willa opened for him as he shifted his large body between her thighs. She welcomed him, reveling in his solid weight atop her. His fingers speared her sheath, testing and stretching her. But she didn't need much prep work, not when her body recognized she belonged to him on a cellular level. One touch and she was wet and aching for him.

There were no lingering caresses or playful banter. A passionate storm thundered between them. Two storm fronts slamming into one another and creating a tornado. His kiss was punishing in his attempt to prove her wrong. And there

was a part of her that wanted to relent. That wanted to say she was sorry for even suggesting it and agree to whatever he wanted as long as he never left her side.

And when he slipped inside, she clung. Her arms surrounded his torso. Her fingers dug into his back as they moved together. Amazement flooded her over how good he felt plunging deep and connecting them, how right he felt. Because her body rolled out the welcome mat.

Oh god, how was she ever going to live without him? Now that she knew what heaven tasted like. Now that she'd peaked behind the curtain and knew beyond a reasonable doubt how magnetic their connection was, the likelihood she would ever find anything like this again was slim at best.

And it's why she had to have him one last time. She needed to shore up as many memories as possible to keep her warm in the days and years to come.

In another life, she would have loved him forever. If she were different, more confident in her ability to navigate his world, there wouldn't be a force on this earth that would keep her from him. And she knew a soul-deep truth. One she had avoided since the moment they met—she loved him.

As a romance writer, she never fully believed in instalove. Instalust, sure. That happened a lot. She'd experienced it before with some of the Doms at *The Eros Pit*. But her first look at Jake blew all her suppositions into the atmosphere. How could it not?

Because she had taken one look at his sexy smile and loved him. And then he'd charmed her. Allowed her to see the man behind the playboy exterior. He was sweet, yummy goodness, wrapped in the most exquisite packaging with a bad boy attitude and a heart vaster than any ocean.

This was a man she wanted to submit to for the rest of her existence.

But she had to let him go. She wasn't strong enough for his world. And if he cheated—let's face it, professional baseball

players traveled a lot and had women throwing themselves at them—it would crush her soul.

The thought of letting him go, of never seeing him again, had tidal waves of grief striking through her heart.

And she clung even tighter, needing him to feel her emotions and know she cared before saying goodbye. She was loving him because she knew she was about to lose him.

Jake lifted his mouth and demanded. “Look at me.”

The moment their gazes connected, he snarled. “Don’t you do it. Don’t you dare walk away from me, from this, from us.”

She should have known that he would know her thoughts. That he would see her intent before she could verbalize it.

“Jake.” Her bottom lip trembled, and a stray tear slid down her cheek.

“No. I won’t let you. I can’t—not when I just found you. We’re meant to be, you and I.”

Her heart was breaking. Shattering into a million pieces over his declaration. But she had to remain firm in her resolve. She cupped his cheek. “Just love me for whatever time we have left.”

Anger flashed across his gaze. “It doesn’t have to be like that. We can make it work.”

“Jake.” More tears fell, and she shook her head. And he knew. She saw it in his eyes that this was it. That there would be no happily ever after for them.

On a groan that sounded as if it had been ripped from his soul, he slammed his lips over her mouth. He punished her with his kiss. Made her understand she’d hurt him with her refusal to continue their relationship. And Willa gave him what he wanted. She surrendered.

And his fury bled through. He screwed her riding that fury. Showing her what she would miss out on. God, she would miss him. She didn’t see herself ever getting over him.

She tried holding back the tide. Tried stalling the ecstasy battering her being. And yet, her body no longer belonged to her. It was a vessel for him to slake his lust. Malleable. His, forever.

And the climax tore through her body and had her damn near levitating off the bed. An acute profoundness of the forthcoming loss acted like a dagger through her heart. Tears squeezed from between her closed eyelids.

Jake's body strained, furiously thrusting, driving inside her clasping sheath as he emptied inside her. And it was driven home they'd forgotten to use protection this last time. That they'd taken one another without any latex between them.

In her heart of hearts, a part of her hoped her birth control failed. That she would have a little piece of him she got to keep.

But she also knew that was wishful thinking.

He buried his face against her neck. And they simply held the other. No words. No promises. No turning back.

His heartbeat thumped against his chest. Willa would watch him play year after year. She didn't even watch baseball, but she would be his biggest fan. And she would watch him fall for another woman. A woman who fit in his world and looked like she belonged, which was something she would never achieve.

Willa pressed her lips against his neck, inhaling his scent. And Jake held her tight. Acting like he didn't intend to let her go.

But she had to move. Otherwise, she would cave. She wasn't strong enough to put up much of a fight. "I need to get ready to head to the airport."

He lifted his head and stared. "Give me another day. I'll buy you a new ticket and pay for the hotel room. Just give me more time."

It took everything inside Willa not to jump at the chance. His offer swam through her mind and made her heart clench. If she stayed, if she said yes, she wouldn't be strong enough to

let him go. Another night in his arms and she would drag him before a judge and make him hers forever, and damn the consequences.

It was the hardest thing she'd ever had to do. Willa cleared her throat and swallowed back her tears. "I can't. I have deadlines."

Jake's expression shuttered. His lush lips flattened into a hard line. And he withdrew, breaking the connection, and rolled off her. Before she could apologize and make him understand, he rose from the bed.

She sat, pulling the sheet up over her nakedness. But he didn't even glance her way. He dragged his boxers and slacks up his legs, then angrily shoved his arms through his shirt sleeves and covered his chest.

He snagged the book she'd signed to him while he'd gone to the bathroom earlier. She had signed it: *I will always remember that you chose me. This weekend will live with me forever. I wish I was strong enough for your world. But know not a day will pass that I won't think of you. I wish you a lifetime of happiness.*

At the door to her room, he glanced her way. "Last chance."

The ultimatum fell between them.

Willa rose from the bed, taking the sheet with her. She ignored the light of hope in his eyes. Reaching up, she pressed her lips against his cheek and whispered, "Be happy, Jake."

And then she retreated and headed into the bathroom. She locked the door. Because if he followed her and touched her again, she knew she wouldn't be able to resist.

But she had nothing to worry about. Jake slammed her room door as he exited. The reverberations echoed and trembled through the space.

She clamped her hand over her mouth. Pain lanced through her chest, and the tears she'd held back fell like rain.

She'd done the right thing, hadn't she?

Jake strode away from her room, feeling as if his heart had been ripped from his chest while it was still beating.

Karma. That's what this was, karma kicking his ass for his cavalier, playboy lifestyle. How many women had wanted more and he turned them down flat? Too many to count.

He barreled into his hotel room and hurled her book across the room like he was trying to throw a runner out at second. Only to stagger to his knees with a roar torn from his soul. The pain gutted him. How could she say no? He knew she felt as deeply as he did. Why would she kick him out of her life?

He needed to go back and convince her to change her mind. Hell, he wasn't above kidnapping her, taking her to a cabin in the woods, and fucking the refusal out of her body. Because he'd never felt this way about any woman before.

Fuck! He didn't even have her phone number. He should have snuck onto her phone and called his cell. That way he'd at least have her number.

Uncertainty dodged him. For the first time in his life, Jake didn't have a playbook. He had no idea what it would take to win her. He felt like he'd been pummeled within an inch of his life.

Beyond dejected, he stripped and headed into the shower. Standing beneath the hot spray, it smacked him upside the head. Of course she turned him down. He'd only acted like he wanted to keep fucking her. While he did want that, wanted to

feel her writhe and begging him to come, there was so much more he wanted from her.

And like an idiot, he'd done nothing to alleviate the fear he spied in her eyes. Nope, he'd done what he always did—he let her think it was only her body he wanted. But that wasn't the case at all. He wanted her shy smiles and the way she fit him when they were snuggled together in bed. He wanted to plumb the depths of her mind and her sweet heart.

Rinsing off the soapsuds, he left the shower in a trail of water. He snagged a towel off the hook and hurriedly dried himself. He didn't bother with boxers, shoving his legs into his jeans and grabbing the first clean shirt he could find. All he knew was that he needed to get to her, needed to make her see reason, and do whatever it took to make her his.

With his hair still damp, he snagged his room keycard and shoved his phone in his back pocket before racing out the door. Jake rode the elevator up to the tenth floor.

The moment the doors opened, he sprinted off the elevator and down the hall to her room. He pounded on the door.

“Willa. Open up.” His fist thudded against the door.

One of the maid carts was two doors down, and a uniformed woman emerged from the room. She was older, with streaks of gray in her dark hair. “Can I help you, sir?”

“I'm trying to get my girlfriend to open the door. We had a fight. It was dumb, but we're going to miss our flight. And my keycard isn't working. Could you let me in?”

“She left already, the woman staying in that room.”

“She had her suitcase with her?” Please say no.

“Yes, she had all her belongings with her and left twenty minutes ago.”

His heart dropped through the fucking floor. She'd left while he was bemoaning his fate. “Thank you.”

Maybe he could still catch her. He ran like his life depended on it back to the elevators. He rode it down to the lobby, praying he wasn't too late. When he didn't spy her

anywhere in the lobby, he headed over to the registration desk and asked the redheaded clerk, “The woman in room 1014. Has she already checked out? I have something of hers and need to return it.”

“I’m sorry, sir, but it’s hotel policy that we cannot give the status of another guest. Is there something else—”

Ignoring her, he turned away and strode to the front door. Mayhap she was outside and waiting for a cab. But when he stood in the circular drive, with people loading up vehicles or climbing into cabs. The young bellhop outside grinned and asked, “Good morning. Do you need a taxi, sir?”

“Did you see a woman with chestnut hair about this tall,” he held his hand up to his shoulder, “leave?”

“Yes. She just left in a cab.” He nodded his blond head, still looking at him expectantly.

The world swam before him. She was gone. He didn’t know what airline she was flying. He didn’t have her phone number. He only had her two names, the real one and the author one.

The second defeat hurt worse than the first.

Jake nodded solemnly. “Thank you.”

His footsteps weary and his heart heavy, he returned to his suite. He spied the book casually lying on the ground. In his fury, he’d been careless with the only thing he had left of her.

He lifted the book off the ground as if it were handspun glass. Then he noticed the handwriting inside the book cover.

He read the inscription.

I will always remember that you chose me. This weekend will live with me forever. I wish I was strong enough for your world. But know not a day will pass that I won’t think of you. I wish you a lifetime of happiness.

And he sank onto the edge of the bed. Not strong enough for his world? Was that what she really thought? Was that why she’d turned him down? Because she didn’t think she fit?

Jake wanted to rage. He should have sat her down and talked to her more. But he'd been caught up in her, in the feel of her in his arms, that he'd forgotten a critical component. His life, for better and sometimes worse, was in the limelight.

And he should have told her he would protect her, shield her from the eyes of the media as much as possible if she wasn't comfortable with it. Hell, half the time he hated it, but it came with the job.

He pulled up her author website on his phone. Then located the contact form. It was the only way he had to reach her.

Willa, I know you're scared, but I will protect you with everything I am. Please call me when you get this.

And he left his number. He knew it might take a few days or weeks—if she responded to his message at all. He just had to be persistent and patient. She would call him. He had to believe that what she wrote in the book meant she wanted him just as much, but was scared. And then he went and signed up for her newsletter.

This way, at least, he could keep track of what was happening in her career. Perhaps if she posted about a book signing or an appearance, he could fly there and make her listen.

God, he had it bad. She'd changed his entire world in two nights. His heart beat for her now.

With a heavy heart, he did the only thing he could. He packed his bags and got ready to fly home to Philadelphia.

On the flight home that afternoon, he sat in a row by himself and read her book. Unlike the trip down, the flight home was one of quiet self-reflection for the team and staff instead of the party atmosphere.

And as he read, he glimpsed a peek inside Willa's heart and mind, firming his resolve to make her his for all time.

Even though he knew it would take a miracle.

Willa was home for a week before she felt like she could emerge from her house without sobbing. She did what she always did when she was feeling low—she went to *The Eros Pit*. If nothing else, she'd have a drink at the bar, and at least she wouldn't be alone. Plus, she enjoyed the ambiance. It had been decorated to look like a gentlemen's club circa 1890, with lots of black furniture and gray walls illuminated by golden chandeliers giving it a warm, intimate feel.

She was at the club for fifteen minutes before she realized coming here had been a grave mistake. She wasn't ready to be around people, let alone scene with a Dom. The only man she wanted was lost to her forever. Fate was a cruel bitch.

“Willa, I must say you're looking quite fetching this evening. Up for a scene tonight, love?” Ronan asked, his bass a deep, gravelly rumble.

Willa glanced at the big, beefy professional rugby player. He was only six-two, but with his massive muscles and barrel chest, he appeared bigger. His inky hair was shorn in a buzz cut. His blue eyes danced with mirth. This Dom was the life of the party and more alive than anyone she knew—except Jake.

Willa shook her head in refusal. “No, Sir, not tonight. I just stopped by for a drink.”

“Are you sure I can't convince you?” Ronan eyed her up and down like a snack. Any other time, she would have been

down for an evening with him. He was an inventive, passionate, pleasure Dom and excelled at oral.

“Yes. I’m sorry, Sir,” she winced, hating the disappointment that surfaced in his blue gaze.

“Another time then, love. Enjoy your evening.”

“You too,” she murmured to his retreating back.

And that was how her night progressed. She had three more Doms approach her before she figured it was time to call it quits. Jake wasn’t going to mysteriously appear at the bar.

She’d lost him. Because she was, in fact, an idiot. Now she knew what life without him would entail, and she would rather brave the media circus around him than live without him. It was her own fault. She’d been her own worst enemy because it had all happened so fast. He’d spun her head and her heart until she hadn’t been able to make heads or tails of things.

She tossed a few bills on the bar, ready to head home, don her pajamas, and break out the chocolate.

“Willa, a word, if you would.”

She turned and found Gabe Ryan in a three-piece charcoal suit, looking dashing, even with the sprinkling of gray at his temples. She thought the gray made him look distinguished. She swallowed her fear. She’d been respectful to each of the Doms she turned down, so she shouldn’t be in trouble. “Sure. What can I do for you, Master Gabe?”

“Follow me.” He nodded his head toward the elevator.

She sucked in a swift breath, nodding her acquiescence. She couldn’t verbalize a response with her throat tight. Like a dutiful submissive, she followed Master Gabe up to the fourth floor, where his office was located.

He led her to his office, flicking on lights, and jerked his chin toward one of the black leather chairs. “Have a seat.”

She sat lightly on the edge of the smooth leather, clutching her purse in her lap, sure that her hands would rip it to shreds if she weren’t careful.

Gabe took a seat behind his desk. His gaze was somber. “So tell me, Willa, what’s going on? Why are you turning down Doms left and right?”

Her eyes filled. She didn’t mean to let it happen. But before she could stop herself, the dam burst. Big fat tears rolled fast and furious down her cheeks. “I met someone at the conference I attended last weekend.”

Gabe studied her, a slight frown marring his brow. “And it’s not cause for celebration? Did he hurt you?”

No. She hurt herself—and him.

“I ... it’s all my fault. He wanted more, but I was scared. His job makes him a celebrity, and I didn’t think I could handle the snide comments from the media.”

Gabe held up a hand. “Snide comments about what?”

Willa gestured to her body. “Me. My body. I’m not the type of woman a professional baseball player hooks up with and keeps, nor allows themselves to be seen in public together.”

“Did he say you weren’t his type or cut out for it? Or did you insinuate the worst would happen?”

“It’s me.” She was the problem, not him. He’d begged her to reconsider. And she’d walked away from the best thing that had ever happened to her.

“And what did this baseball player say when you explained your feelings on the matter?”

Willa winced. “I didn’t tell him anything other than it wouldn’t work.”

“And why do you think that, hmm?”

“Because I’m not a woman that men choose first.” Or she hadn’t been until Jake, and that seemed to open the floodgates with all the male attention she had garnered tonight.

Gabe scowled. “Willa, you’re a beautiful, independent woman who any man, Dom or otherwise, would be lucky to

have on their arm. Did you ever stop to ask yourself why you think you can't find happiness and love?"

"It's just that no one ever really has. And if I look at his history, he's a player. He's likely already moved on. And I don't have his number anyway to contact him and attempt to reconcile and apologize."

"Willa, sometimes all it takes for men is the right woman. Did you ever stop to think of that? We don't say things we don't mean. Especially not once we have the one we want in bed."

She hung her head. "Oh god. I know I made the biggest mistake of my life. And I don't know how to contact him. We didn't exchange phone numbers because of me."

"What's his name? With my connections, I'll see if I can get his number or address for you," Gabe offered, his eyes kind and sympathetic.

"Jake Fletcher."

His brows rose at his name. "The catcher with the Philadelphia Flashes?"

"That's the one." She snagged another tissue and dabbed at her tears.

He handed her the box. "Take them with you. And have you considered what other means he might have tried to contact you?"

She sucked in a breath. "Oh my god! The contact form on my website. He might have ... I'm sorry, I need to go. I need —" Jake. But she didn't say his name out loud.

But Gabe knew. He nodded toward his door, his lips curled up at the corners. "Go. I'll let you know if I'm able to turn anything up on his contact info."

She rose from her seat with a nod. "Thank you so much, Master Gabe. Sophia is a lucky lady."

Gabe smiled widely. "She is, but only because it took me almost losing her to spend my days worshipping her. And no matter what happens with your ballplayer, Willa, be happy."

Willa thanked him again and raced out the door. Once she arrived home, she brought up the email server where all her contact form submissions were sent. She scrolled through hundreds of messages. Since hitting the *New York Times*, messages from her contact form on her website exploded in the best of ways. But it meant she was scrolling for a while before she came across one that made her rejoice.

At spying his name, she cheered. In the days since they parted, he sent her message after message. She read through every single one he sent.

Willa, answer me, woman. Call me.

Willa, I won't let anything bad happen. We're meant to be. I need to tell you how I feel.

The list went on and on. By the time she reached the end of his messages, she was sobbing. Because the connection had been as deep for him as it was for her. She didn't know how to make it better. How to apologize and ensure he knew she meant it.

And it was the last one that made the lightbulb come on.

Willa, I just finished Tangled in You. My god, woman, you are so damn talented. I've already bought the rest of your books and will read every single one. Call me when you get this. Please.

She opened a new Word document and started writing. The story flowed from her fingertips. Her fingers flew over the keyboard. It gripped her by the throat and wouldn't relent.

And she spent the next few days writing it, ignoring her other deadlines in favor of the story ripped from her heart. She ignored her agent. She ignored her editor asking about the book on deadline. She ignored food, showers, her phone, her mail, herself.

Nothing else mattered but getting *their* story on paper.

She wrote the entire book within a week. When she finished at five minutes to midnight a week after her meeting with Gabe, she sent it off to her editor, knowing she would

need it edited before she published it. Before she sent it to him.

And once it was finally off to her editor, she went horizontal for twelve hours straight. But this time, for the first time since leaving Houston, she went to bed with hope in her heart.



Two weeks passed before she received the book back from her editor. But she already had the cover made for *Midnight Player*. And once she finished the round of edits, then forwarded it to her proofreader and back, she was finally able to put the book up for sale. But she wasn't done. She finally, finally for the love of god, had received the rush order on the print books.

And Gabe, bless the man, had been able to score his mailing address. She owed him a gift basket for his help. Even if the outcome she yearned for didn't materialize the way she hoped.

On the interior of the book, she signed it.

I love you.

Always yours,

Willa

Sir can reach me at.

And she included her phone number, mailing address, and private email. She would send up smoke signals if that's what it took to get his attention and get her man back.

She raced to the post office and shipped it overnight, hoping and praying he would forgive her callous disregard.

Three days before Christmas

At the rather ungodly hour of eight in the morning, her doorbell rang. She bolted out of bed at the sound. Willa met another deadline last night. And always slept like the dead once she finished. Her doorbell rang again. With a snarl because she hadn't even had coffee yet, she descended the stairs, still in pajamas with her hair askew, imitating Medusa's hairstyle, and mumbled to herself as she approached the door. "Just remember, orange is not your color. Murder is wrong."

She yanked the door open, ready to unleash a furious diatribe. But it died the moment she spied the man standing on her front porch in jeans and a leather jacket.

Jake. He was here. At her house. Had she died? She opened her mouth to question him.

But he didn't say a word. With the door open, he waltzed right inside her house, took her face between his hands, and kissed her. Every part of her being rejoiced. She thought she heard choirs of angels sing as he kissed her with a passion that almost brought her to her knees. She clung to him. Her hands gripped his coat. And she kissed him back with all the love she held for him.

They stood in her foyer, the door open, kissing each other blind.

Until Jake finally tore his mouth away. Still holding her face between his hands, he lowered his forehead until it

touched hers. “Fuck, woman, I missed you. I hope you’re prepared, because I want it all, sugar. I love you, Willa.”

Jake held her. He was touching her again. And in his eyes was a love and devotion so powerful, she felt it down to her core.

He loved her.

“Is this real?” she babbled. “It can’t be real. I’m dreaming, right? Delirious after hitting my deadline.”

“Look at me, love. I read *Midnight Player*. And I’m the best you ever had. Really?”

At a time like this, that was the part he focused on. “Yes. It’s true. Every word.”

“I want to hear you say it.”

“First, I need to say I’m sorry. I was scared. And I know you’ll help me and eventually I’ll grow accustomed to the media circus. But I also need you to know that I love you, Jake. I love you so much, and I never should have let you leave that way. Please forgive me.”

“Sugar, there’s nothing to forgive. Unless you tell me you want me to leave.”

She shut the door with one hand, never taking her eyes off him, afraid he might disappear. “I don’t want you to leave. Ever. And I know with you in Philadelphia, it might be tricky. But as long as I have my laptop and Wi-Fi, I can work from anywhere in the world. I could travel with the team. I could—”

He sealed his lips over hers for a kiss that burned down to her toes. And she knew in that moment they would make it. They were too in love with each other not to make this relationship work. They’d experienced life without the other. And she had hated every moment spent apart.

When he lifted his mouth, a smile broke out on his face. “I was actually going to ask you if you don’t mind me bunking with you.”

“But what about the team? Your home in Philadelphia?”

“That’s why it took me so long. You see, I just inked a three-year deal with the Denver Bucks.”

He did what? “Wait? You’re going to live here? In Denver?”

“I was hoping I’d be living with you.” He brushed her hair from her face and stared with a lopsided grin.

She burst into tears at the cacophony of joy flowing through her. “Please tell me this isn’t a dream. That I’m not in bed having the most fabulous dream of my life. That I’ll wake up and you’ll be gone.”

He pressed her back against the door, letting her feel every inch of him. “Does this feel like you’re dreaming?”

“No,” she whispered. He was hard and ready. And she ached, needing him inside her in the worst way.

“And it’s okay if you’re not ready for us to live together yet. If I need to, I can find a place to rent for a few months until you are ready.”

She touched his jaw in wonder. “No, your place is here—with me.”

His smile lit up every dark corner of her soul and mended all her broken pieces. “Good. I’m glad you said that. The moving truck should be here tomorrow.”

She gasped. “What? You already made plans to move in all your stuff?”

“Sugar, after reading our love story, I’ve never been surer of anything in my life. And I don’t want to spend another second without you. I want to go to bed each night by your side and wake every morning with you in my arms. It’s you and me, forever.”

Willa didn’t know what she had done to get so lucky. But she was never letting him go again. With her heart in her throat, she nodded. “Jake, I—yes, to all of it. Just don’t ever let me go.”

“Never,” he swore. Then kissed her again, and within his kiss was the promise of all their sweet tomorrows. And she

couldn't believe her good fortune that this reformed player wanted to be hers forever. Not a day would pass without her telling him how much she loved him. She would never take him or his love for granted.

"Now, about that club you mentioned in our book. Think I could get an invite?" he asked when they came up for air.

"I'll make sure of it as long as you take me to bed right now."

"Making demands already?" he teased and wiggled his brows.

"Yes, but only because I don't want to go another second without you in my arms."

"Likewise, love." Jake gallantly swept her up into his arms. Then he carried her upstairs to the bedroom to ravish her.

And her heart, which she once worried would never find the love she'd written countless stories about, had finally found its home. He was a hero worth waiting for.

EPILOGUE

Four months later - Opening Day

Today was his first game playing for the Denver Bucks. He liked his new team. The players were all hungry to go after that ring. And even if they weren't, it didn't matter to him anymore. Not that he didn't intend to play his heart out and try to make it to the Championship Series again, because he would. But now that he had Willa, everything else paled in comparison.

And his teammates loved her; their wives and girlfriends loved her. She was in the stands behind home plate with the other wives. And she looked as lovely as ever. He knew she was nervous and might murder him for what he was about to do. But he wanted the world to know that this reformed rake had found his love and was officially off the market.

After the players were introduced, he had her invited onto the field. As she approached him, wearing a jersey with his number and jeans, he knew she was nervous. Those goddess eyes darted around at the stands as she neared. When she reached him, he took her delicate hands in his. Hands he had watched in fascination as they flew over her keyboard when she wrote.

“What’s going on, Jake?” Her smile was stretched over her face, but it wasn’t genuine.

“Eyes on me, sugar.”

In the months since he’d been in Denver, he’d been granted full membership to *The Eros Pit* and had been

welcomed into the close-knit community. Many of the members were in the crowd tonight. But he wanted to show the world how much he loved this woman. How much he wanted the world to know this former bad boy had been completely reformed. And it was all because of the woman staring up at him with questions stamped across her brow but trust in her eyes.

With cameras trained on them, he lowered himself onto one knee.

“Willa, I love you so much. I love the life we’ve built together. And I want forever with you. Marry me and love me forever?”

Tears slid down her face. She gasped when he withdrew a ring from his pocket. “Yes. I never thought I could love anyone the way I love you. A thousand times, yes.”

The stadium went fucking wild as he slipped the ring on her finger. Then he rose and cupped her face between his hands.

But he didn’t care about the crowd or his teammates or the fact that his proposal would make the ten o’clock news. He only had eyes for Willa. His love. She was his life. He held her lovely tear-stained face in his hands and kissed her. He kissed her with every ounce of love he felt for her.

And he’d never known he could feel this happy and complete. It was the two of them against the world—forever.



Seven months later

“*T*hat’s a winner, folks! The Denver Bucks won the Championship Series!”

They won. It was done. But even being crowned a world champion didn’t hold a candle to what came next in his life. He searched the crowd they allowed onto the field, full of family, friends, and staff. The cluster of people was massive. Confetti rained down upon their heads. Television crews were

on the field speaking with his teammates. He knew they would announce the MVP award, and he was a shoo-in for it. But none of it mattered.

And then he saw her. The woman who would belong to him forever, with only a week and a half to go before the wedding. He prowled toward her, consumed by her, ignoring all the claps on the back and congratulatory words. He just kept threading his way through the crowd.

When she finally spied him, a huge smile chock full of love broke out over her face. And he was struck again at how much he loved her.

They rushed toward each other. Like two magnets drawn inexplicably toward the other.

She threw herself into his arms and murmured in his ear. “I’m so proud of you. You’re a world champion!”

He kissed her with all the love he felt for this woman. She was the best part of his life. “Yeah, I am. But you know what title I’m looking forward to the most?”

She shook her head, beaming at him with such love in her eyes it humbled him. “No. What?”

“Husband.”

Her eyes went dewy with emotions. “Jake. I can’t wait to marry you. I love you so much. And I’ve never been so excited to be called wife.”

He caught a single teardrop on his thumb. “Then let’s get married. Tonight.”

“But our wedding is a week and a half away!”

“I asked the team owner if we won, if I could borrow his jet to fly us to Vegas tonight. He’s got his flight crew standing by.”

“But what about the big wedding next week? All our family and friends are coming. And I doubt we can get the deposit on the venue back. I don’t even have my dress with me.”

“We’ll still get married then, in front of our friends and family, with you in your white dress and me in the penguin suit. I went ahead and packed one of your dresses that’s my favorite. But if you don’t like what I packed, you can buy a new one in Vegas. But I want tonight for us. I don’t want to go another day without being married to you. What do you say? Want to marry me tonight?”

“Yes!” she cried and hugged him tight.

Joy burst forth within his chest because she would finally, finally be his forever. And he was going to love her more than anyone ever had.

He might have won the world championship tonight. But it paled in comparison to the prize he held in his arms. His Willa. His love. His *wife*.

THANK YOU!

Thank you so much for reading **MIDNIGHT PLAYER!** I hope you loved Jake and Willa's story. If you did, please consider leaving a review! And sign-up for my [newsletter](#) to receive updates on the rest of the Dungeon Singles Night Series.

Want more seductive love stories in the Dungeon Singles Night Series? Read **MIDNIGHT MASQUERADE** for **FREE**. And as a special treat, take a peek at the first chapter. And then [download the full book here](#) for **FREE!**

EXCERPT FROM MIDNIGHT MASQUERADE

*S*on of a bitch!

She'd pulled it off again.

Gabriel Ryan surveyed the crowded scene at Eternal Eros, amazed by the transformation of his club. Tonight, it was decorated for the feast of May Day, with May Day poles stationed throughout the club. Great wreaths, and streamers bursting with colorful flowers were draped along balconies and overhead, transforming the black floors and walls into something bordering on ethereal. The patrons in attendance were fully invested, dressed in all manner of costumes from elegant to bawdy, with the added touch of masks, shielding their real personas, allowing them to transform themselves for the Masquerade Ball. In a few short months, his event coordinator, Sophia, had taken his club from great to the crème de la crème of nightclubs in Denver, catapulting it into the top hot spot in the city.

His bank account wept with joy.

There wasn't much Gabe relished more than adding to his company's sizable funds, the exception being finding a sub for the night, and losing himself in the pleasures of the flesh. Not that there had been much of that lately. There always seemed to be one task or another vying for his attention. Eternal Eros was one of many companies under the umbrella of RMD Industries, his family's conglomerate enterprise that was the parent company for a plethora of businesses—including this club.

Thinking of his event coordinator, he smiled. The ballsy woman was half his size, smart as a whip, immensely creative, and didn't back away from a fight, not to mention she was a stunning beauty, with one of the purest souls he had ever met.

It really was a shame she worked for him, because she stirred him with her direct gaze and take no prisoners attitude. But since she did, she was in the off-limits category. Gabe prided himself on his control. It was part and parcel of being a Master. In his opinion, a Dom who couldn't manage his lust and baser instincts, was a piss poor excuse for a Dominant. It was why he followed a set of self-imposed rules he had established years ago.

Rule number one: he didn't fuck his employees. Ever.

Mixing business with pleasure was simply bad business.

Rule number two: no falling in love. Gabe kept his heart to himself, no matter the scene or the submissive. Nothing good ever came from allowing your emotions to get in the way. It was why he kept his interactions with the opposite sex to the club or the private playroom in his penthouse, but he never allowed the women to spend the night, and didn't permit them anywhere near his bedroom.

And rule number three: never lose control. A Master who couldn't control himself and his responses in all things was a sad excuse for a Dom.

After a turn around the first floor of Eternal Eros, Gabe was pleased at how smoothly the event was functioning as he noted more of the decorative touches. He shook his head at the elaborate costumes on display, at the female bounty in skintight dresses, and the masks covering all the faces—including his own—adding an air of mystery to the sold out event.

When he was satisfied by his perusal, and reassured the managers in charge of Eternal Eros had the event well in hand, he strode to the elevator to head down to The Eros Pit.

Clapping Jimmy the bouncer on the shoulder as he passed, Gabe said, "Big crowd tonight."

“That it is, boss.” Jimmy nodded his head. His face resembled that of a bulldog; his beefy chest and arms strained the confines of his black shirt with the club logo.

“Don’t have too much fun,” Gabe teased.

Jimmy smiled and wiggled his brows. “Maybe only with one or two tonight.”

Gabe chuckled and nodded. “That’s the spirit.”

By the time he ventured down into the Eros Pit, his exclusive, members only BDSM club hidden a floor beneath Eternal Eros, he was in no mood to play. It had been a spectacularly long day at the office. Shame, really, that his mind and body weren’t on board, given the submissive bounty in his club.

But tonight, he would participate in the event, under threats and orders by Sophia. He sighed over the fact that he could deny the woman little. And she had badgered him from the start about joining in the events each month, until he finally yielded.

Granted, that might have had something to do with the way she had stood in his office earlier today, her hands on her lush hips, a fierce scowl on her face and a glimmer in her eyes that told him that she would forcibly escort him if needed.

He’d folded like a house of cards while ignoring what the sight of her in his office did to him and his libido. Gabe refused to let his dick do his thinking for him, no matter how much Sophia stirred him.

In the elevator, he adjusted the black mask covering his face. He’d not changed into a costume, as much as his event coordinator had pestered him to wear one. The woman had gone so far as to have a costume made for him. But he couldn’t see himself prancing around in the dandy seventeenth century garb, not even to make her happy. Instead, he had stuck with his black suit and navy-blue tie. His one concession, besides his willingness to participate tonight, was the mask covering the top half of his face.

And the mask was all Sophia would get out of him.

The mood in the Eros Pit most nights tended to be more subdued—with the extra added elements of scenes in progress and muted music—than the club upstairs. That was by design on his part. At least, it usually was more laid back, with scenes at various stations and the occasional high-pitched moans from submissives. But tonight, with the masquerade event, the air in the Eros Pit held a thrill of excitement. Submissives in their exotic costumes were grouped together, talking excitedly, wondering who they would end up with for the night.

All participating Doms had been given a station in one of the scene areas or private rooms a floor down. Then the submissives, in their erotic ball wear, selected from a bowl a marker with the scene area and Dom listed. The submissive would head to the scene area or private room upon selection, and then the Dom would join them once all the selections were made.

It was a rather brilliant strategy and way of introducing unattached Doms and submissives to one another. In participating, they were agreeing to scene with another for the night—and possibly more, depending on the connection.

And the place was packed to the gills tonight.

Scanning the crowd, Gabe discovered that even his rascalion brothers were in attendance—and had gotten into the spirit of the event, given their costumes, or most of them had, anyhow. Dean was a no show, but that had been the norm the last few months.

The submissive selection process was already in progress, with peals of laughter and squeals of delight from the women. It was arranged so that by midnight, all the submissives would be at their stations. With time to kill before he went to his private room, Gabe made his way through the throng to his private section of the club. Most nights there were available subs standing near the black velvet rope separating his section of the club, or sitting at one of the booths or tables nearby with the hope that either he or one of his brothers would give them a nod and join them. Yet, this evening, all those subs were dressed in costume and waiting in line to select their Dom.

Gabe sat and nursed a whiskey while he waited, keeping an eye on the festivities, and even grinning at some of the reactions from submissives over their chosen Dom for the night. He'd have to compliment Dean on the latest supply of whiskey from Meath Irish Distillery, another one of the family businesses. The dark copper spirit was top notch, and smooth as melted butter.

When a bell sounded in the club, he swallowed the last finger of whiskey and rose from his seat. Time to get this show on the road. Sophia had assigned him one of his favorite private rooms for the night.

He didn't spy the woman anywhere as he trod toward the elevator with a group of Doms all heading down a floor to the private rooms. But Sophia tended to flit about and move like a hummingbird from one place to the next at these events. On Monday, he would have to commend her for a job well done. And he really needed to consider giving the woman a sizable raise for all her efforts.

She'd be surprised at how closely he watched her—not that he would ever tell her.

At first, he had watched her to see if she would fuck up, because then he would have to toss her out on her ass. He didn't suffer fools lightly, especially when it came to his business. But then he had watched her in pure amazement over her ability to transform the two clubs into something magical each month, and make him a hefty profit in the bargain.

It was why he had given her free rein with the Donovan wedding later this month—the first of its kind at his club.

At the door to his private club room, he released a sigh. He didn't know why he wasn't more excited at the prospect of a scene with an unknown submissive, but he wasn't. Although, he hoped that he could provide the submissive awaiting him with what she needed tonight.

Pushing the door open, he strode inside and was brought up short.

A petite blonde knelt at the foot of the bed, her head bowed, knees parted, and palms up on her thighs. She wore a golden corset around her slim torso, that shimmered in the low lighting. The erotic lingerie elevated her already generous breasts up into pillowy mounds and made them appear like an offering.

The indent of her waist made him wonder if he could circle it with his hands.

But then her hips swelled out in a smooth curve that had his gut tightening and, surprisingly, his dick sprang to life. Granted, it could be the fact that she wore golden crotchless panties. With her thighs spread, he could see the pretty pale pink lips of her labia and smooth bare pussy.

Bloody hell.

Excitement hummed in his blood. Need thrummed in his veins. And his dick swelled painfully against the confines of his slacks. Perhaps Sophia had been correct, and he needed to be here tonight.

“And who are you supposed to be, beauty?” he murmured darkly, referring to her costume. He approached, rather entranced by the pretty picture she made, and the punch of desire suffusing him.

Gabe might have resisted, but in this moment, he was all aboard with the festivities, and eagerly anticipating the night ahead.

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I didn't expect to see her again. Nor was I prepared for the desperate desire she'd ignite in me. I crave her. Want her. Need her.

I can't stay away from her this time. Not when her touch mends all my broken pieces.

She doesn't trust me to stick around but I'll do whatever it takes to prove my devotion. After all, I thrive on adversity. And I'll draw on every ounce of strength I possess to win her heart because now I'm convinced:

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ABOUT ANYA

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Anya grew up listening to Cardinals baseball and reading anything she could get her hands on. She remembers her mother saying if only she would read the right type of books instead of binging her way through the romance aisles at the bookstore, she'd have been a doctor. While Anya never did get that doctorate, she graduated cum laude from the University of Missouri-St. Louis with an M.A. in History.

Anya is a bestselling and award-winning author published in multiple fiction genres. She also writes urban fantasy, paranormal romance, and contemporary romance under the name [Maggie Mae Gallagher](#). A total geek at her core, when she is not writing, she adores attending the latest comic con or spending time with her family. She currently lives in the Midwest with her two furry felines.

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